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The Works of
CHARLES PAUL DEKOCK

WITH A GENERAL INTRODUCTION BY
JULES CLARETIE

FREDERIQUE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY
EDITH MARY NORRIS

VOLUME I



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CHAPTER I

A STAG DINNER AT DEFFIEUX'S. A CHAPTER OF CONFIDENCES. THREE SOUS

“ONE day a lady said to me, ‘M. Rochebrune, could you love two women at the same time?’ I answered her very frankly, ‘I assure you, madame, that I could love a half-dozen, or perhaps more; for it has happened often enough that I have loved more than two at the same time.’ My answer caused the lady to make an almost angry motion, and she said, in a rather scornful tone, ‘I assure you, monsieur, that I would not content myself with a sixth place in the heart of a man whom I should choose, and that if I had the folly to feel the slightest inclination for him, I should be very quickly cured of it when I learned that his love was so trifling.’ Well, my dear fellows, you would not believe how much harm my frankness to this lady wrought me, not with her alone—for although she was young and pretty I had not the slightest intention in my mind in regard to her—but in society. In the circles she frequented, and where I was received also, she repeated what I had said, and a great many ladies to whom I was desirous of paying attention received me so coldly at the first compli-

ment I paid them, that I very soon saw they had a bad opinion of me, and all because, not being a hypocrite, I simply said what I thought. But in society it really is a crime to say what one thinks. Oh, I have more than once repented having given utterance to thoughts which should never be confided to any except those who know us well enough to understand us. But, as society is always disposed to believe evil rather than good, if we have a fault, it gives us a crime; if we confess a weakness, it supposes a vice. It is therefore much better to lie. However, it seems to me that if I were a woman I should prefer a lover who would frankly confess his infidelity, to one who tried to deceive me."

"If I were a woman, I would rather love a man who would love only me and be faithful."

"Confound it, that's a pretty thing to say, and I'm not sure that all women would prefer that kind of a man. There are some faithful lovers who are very dull and tiresome."

"And some unfaithful ones who are so very pleasing."

"I'll go further than that myself. I maintain that directly a man is faithful longer than usual, he becomes stupid. The word is admissible, my dear fellows, he makes his sweetheart yawn with his sighs and his protestations of love; he's always kissing. There's nothing wearies a woman so much as constant kissing."

"Ah, is that what you think, my little Balloquet? That only proves that you are not an adept at kissing, or that the lady is not very fond of you. On the contrary, women adore affectionate men, I know something about that."

"He fancies himself, does Fouvenard! You see, fellows, he wants us to believe that the women adore him."

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"You have a turned-up nose, and women like Roman noses; a man can never look sentimental with a nose like the mouth of a trumpet."

"And do you think it's necessary to look languorous and melancholy in order to make conquests, Balloquet? You make me sorry for you."

"Fouvenard, I'll give you points on this game whenever you like. We'll take these gentlemen as referees; let the waiter bring up six women, no matter what sort or where from, and we'll see to which of us two they will give the preference. How does that suit you?"

Young Balloquet's proposition provoked a general laugh, and a man who was beside me said,—

"The ladies might not want either one or the other of them; what do you think?"

"Confound it, my dear fellows, we are very indulgent to listen to such a dispute as has arisen between Fouvenard and Balloquet, to learn which of the two is thought the uglier? I should like to have an explanation in regard to what Rochebrune

said to us just now. He was talking for a long time and said some very pretty things, but, as I did not quite understand, I ask an explanation of the enigma or the word of the charade, if that's what it is."

"Oh, yes, yes, 'the word'; for I didn't understand anything of it either."

"I did, I understood what he meant, he said that a man could love a dozen women at once."

"Oh, a dozen, why not thirty-six? What Turks you would make, my dear fellows; Rochebrune didn't say that."

"Yes, he did! didn't he?"

"My dear fellows, I demand the floor."

"You shall speak in a minute, Montricourt; after Rochebrune."

"A toast, my dear fellows, first of all."

"Why, of course; we should be churls to refuse a toast when our host proposes it. Fill the cups, waiter."

"How nice champagne is in cups, it recalls the repasts of antiquity; those famous feasts of Lucullus in the chamber of Apollo, or of Mars."

"Yes, those were jolly fellows, who knew how to dine; each supper cost Lucullus in the neighborhood of thirty-nine thousand francs of our money."

"Oh, my dear fellow, don't talk to me about your Romans, I should never take those people for my model; they spent a good deal of money for a meal,

but that doesn't prove that they knew how to eat. In the first place, they extended themselves on couches placed around their tables. How can anyone eat lying down? It's like those people who dine on the grass, which is very inconvenient. Meals on the grass are only agreeable to lovers, who think of everything but eating. As to your cups, they're not ugly, if you fancy them, but they're not so handy to drink from as glasses; then the champagne doesn't foam so well in a cup and one hasn't the pleasure of making it foam the second time by striking one's hand on one's glass — "

"Monsieur Rouffignard, you said well; the Romans understood life, they comprehended existence."

"Because they crowned themselves with flowers during their meals, do you mean?"

"Why, in the first place, it's not altogether disagreeable to have flowers on the head."

"Oh, be quiet, Dumouton. Just try it now, and put on each one of us here a crown of roses, and you will see what we'll look like — masqueraders, guys, nothing less."

"Because our clothes would not lend themselves to that, monsieur — our costume is really very awkward, it lends itself to nothing — but with the tunic and an elegantly draped mantle the crown on the head is not ridiculous; and those slaves who served ambrosia, almost nude, were they not graceful?"

"Oh, yes, slaves of both sexes; that was refined,

I must say. I tell you, your Romans were infamously debauched; they tolerated, lauded all the vices. Why, my dear fellows, what would you think of senators who dared to propose an act by which Cæsar, then aged fifty-seven, should have the right of possession over all women who suited him?

Ah! le joli droit; ah! le joli droit du seigneur!"

"I should very much like to know if he employed those rights."

"Certainly! He was a very great man then."

"Don't you know that they said of him that he was the husband of all women?"

"Yes, and we know the rest."

"Hi! come now, you there, will you soon have done with your Romans?"

"And what about our host's toast? Come, Dupréval, we are waiting. The guns are loaded, the matches lighted."

"Silence at the end down there; Dupréval is going to speak. By Jove! what a noise they're making at the end of the table."

"It's not us, my dear fellow, it's the music you hear. There, listen, they're dancing, there are at least two or three weddings around us."

"What is there surprising in that? Are not wedding feasts always going on at Deffieux's?"

"Well, if I kept a restaurant and had similar customers I should take for a sign 'The Maid of Orleans.'"

"Why, that would be quite out of place. A good many married couples would decline to hold their wedding feast at your place."

"Silence there! Dupréval is on his feet, he is going to speak."

"Gentlemen, you are aware that this repast is the last I shall give as a bachelor; for in a fortnight I am to be married. But before settling down I wished to gather you around me; I wished to enjoy again with you a few moments of the liberty and folly which, a little too frequently perhaps, mark with a white cross my bachelor days. But then, my dear fellows, as one must never be ungrateful, as one must give at least a passing thought to those who have rendered him happy, I propose the health of my mistresses, to whom today I bid a final adieu."

"To Dupréval's mistresses!"

"To our own, messieurs!"

"To the ladies in general, and to the one whom I love in particular!"

"To the pretty ankles and tiny feet!"

"To the blue eyes and fair hair!"

"I prefer brunettes myself!"

"To the beautiful forms!"

"To the Hottentot Venus!"

"To the destruction of corns on the feet!"

"Ah, good, here is Balloquet beginning his nonsense."

"Messieurs, pardon me if I interrupt you, but in proposing to you a toast to my mistresses you

must not think that I meant to say by that that I had several, I am not in that respect so bad as Rochebrune; one at a time is enough for me. But I merely wished to offer a thought to those I have had during the whole of my life as a bachelor. This matter cleared up, I will now yield the floor to our friend, who is going, I believe, to answer the questions which were addressed to him when I proposed a toast."

At this point the eyes of the whole company were turned towards me, for—as you will have surmised, I think—I am Rochebrune. It will do no harm, perhaps, to tell you at once what I was doing and with whom I was at this moment at Deffieux's. There are some people who would have begun by explaining that before allowing you to be present at a repast where the guests were still unknown to you, but I don't like to follow beaten paths, not from any peculiarity, it is merely my taste.

Who am I? Oh, nobody in particular. Who, in fact, is a man who has no great renown, no great talent, no illustrious reputation, no immense fortune? A dwarf, a lilliputian, an atom lost in the crowd. But you will tell me that the world is composed rather of pigmies than giants; and that the principal thing is, not to take up too much room, but to make one's self comfortable in the place that one has.

Unfortunately, I have not had the wisdom to do that. Possessing at an early age a fairly good for-

tune, consisting of about fifteen thousand francs income, but having neither father nor mother to guide or advise me, I found myself, perhaps rather too soon, my own master; for if reason ripens fast in adversity, it is usually exactly the opposite in the lap of luxury.

You see youths who show the reason and the courage of a man among those who are obliged to work to maintain their families; but place these same young men in a fortunate position and they would do all the foolish things which came into their heads; and why? Because, of course, it is natural that people should like to please; and when we are wise, credit for it can rarely be given to our own will, but should be given rather to the circumstances with which we are surrounded, particularly when they are adverse; which proves that poverty also has its good side. But if you will kindly permit it, we will come back to myself.

My name is Charles Rochebrune. I am not a young man, I am thirty. How time flies! it is frightful! To be thirty years old and to have got on no better than I have done; which means that instead of getting on I have gone back. At twenty, I possessed fifteen thousand francs income a year! now, I have not more than eight. If I go on like that, in a few years I shall have nothing. But have I not got accomplishments and experience for my money? As for experience, I think not, since I am continually perpetrating the same faults over and

over again. As for accomplishments, I have very few, because I wanted to acquire them all and have never stuck to any one of them. I had a vocation for the arts, so it followed that I tried them all; that is to say, I know a little of each one, which means that I know nothing well. In turn a painter, sculptor, musician, poet; I have tasted of them all without going into any of them thoroughly. Oh, wretched inconstancy of taste, of disposition! Hardly had I begun to study anything than that fatal inclination for change which is my second nature caused me to turn my thoughts to some other object. I would say to myself, "I was mistaken. It is not painting which fires me, it is music," and I would drop my camel's-hair brushes and sing and play the piano, and when I had shouted for an hour I would imagine that I was a composer and that I might be reckoned on to produce an opera.

There was but one inclination with me which never varied, and that was my love for women; and yet they say that I have maintained with them my reputation for liking change. But because a person loves flowers, must he never pick more than one? I like gardeners' bouquets.

As for that, who can prove that I should not have been constant had I found a woman who would have loved me truly, who would have loved me forever and—notwithstanding— The "notwithstanding" means a great many things which the ladies will understand at once— But I had one

great defect amongst the fair sex. I will not confide it to you yet ; you will know it quickly enough when you are a little better acquainted with me.

I was saying, then, that my parents, that is to say my father, had left me a fortune. As for my mother, she had had two husbands ! I was born of her second marriage, and, as she had nothing when she married my father, it was to the latter that I owe the fortune I have so ill employed up to the present. After all, have I so ill employed it if it brought happiness ? Ah, but in the midst of that life of pleasure, folly, change, regrets and hopes and disappointments, I am not quite certain that I have been really happy.

I have wished to settle down also, to make what they call an end of it ; that is to say, marry ; although marriage is not always the end of our folly, and is often the beginning of our sorrows. I loved the girl to whom I was engaged. I was not madly in love with her, but she pleased me, and I believed in the beloved object. An unexpected event broke off my marriage, and since that time I have entirely renounced all projects of the kind, because the same event might happen again. What event, do you say ? Ah, that is my secret ; I am not yet intimate enough with you to keep nothing from you.

It seems to me that I have been talking about myself sufficiently long ; it must have bored you. Now I am going to introduce to you most of the men with whom I am at this moment at Deffieux's

I say most, for we are fifteen at table and I do not know them all.

To begin with the host, Dupréval, he who is giving this dinner, as he has told us, as a farewell to his bachelor life.

Dupréval is a lawyer; an excellent fellow, neither handsome nor ugly, but a moneyed man, a man of figures, of calculations; he is marrying as a good stroke of business. He will keep his word, he will renounce all his bachelor follies, or I shall be much surprised; he is a man who will make his way, and the object he has in view is wealth; he will walk straight to it, and nothing will turn him aside.

I admire those men who stand firmly to their resolutions, and whom nothing can cause to deviate from the line of conduct they have marked out for themselves; I admire them, but I never imitate them. Chance is such a delightful thing, and it is so amusing to believe in it.

Beside Dupréval is a stout young man of medium height, but strongly built, with a high color, with cheeks that are always as red and shiny as a snow-apple. Unluckily, this perpetual freshness of complexion is his only beauty, provided you are willing to permit that high color is a beauty. The gentleman's face is cheerful, and indicates that he is the life and soul of any company in which he happens to be. His mouth is a yawning cavern, his eyes are exceedingly small, but to make up for this they are incessantly rolling and sparkling or

looking rather boldly at the ladies. A thicket of light hair covers his head. This is M. Balloquet, a medical student. I even think that he has taken his degree as a doctor ; but he has a small practice, or, rather, he has no practice at all. He thinks of nothing but amusing himself, as do so many doctors of his age. I don't want, however, to say any evil of Balloquet ; for he is a very good fellow and we are friendly.

A little further off is a young man of ordinary height, very thin and with a yellow complexion ; an enormous beard, a mustache and whiskers cover the greater part of his face, so that one can see scarcely anything else beside his nose, which is long and thin, and his eyes, which are deep set and shaded with eyebrows which threaten to become almost as bushy as his beard. This gentleman looks excessively fatigued. This is all that one can see under the mass of chestnut hair which covers his face. This is M. Fouvenard. I think he is in business, but his business appears to have diminished, which does not prevent his constantly boasting of his past conquests and his present good fortune with the ladies.

Beside me on my left is a stout papa, as round as a ball, with a jolly expression and a broad, rubicund face. This is M. Rouffignard, an appraiser and auctioneer, who is no longer a young man, but who holds his own with the young men very well indeed. He does not by any means sulk at the table.

Near this gentleman is a remarkably handsome fellow called Montricourt; he looks self-satisfied, and on slight acquaintance is likely to be thought fatuous; but on talking with him, people find him a great deal more amiable than his pretentious dress and appearance would have led them to believe.

Then comes a man between thirty-six and forty, ugly rather than good-looking; with sleek hair, sly eyes, an equivocal smile, who speaks slowly, as though he is carefully weighing what he should say; with a honeyed voice and an excessively polite manner. He is a Treasury clerk; and his name is M. Faisandé. When someone said a few words that were rather free at the beginning of the repast, I noticed that he frowned and compressed his lips, just as a lady might have done who had strayed into our company. After he had drunk five or six kinds of wine he compressed his lips less; but at each broad joke that escaped us — and at a man's dinner which is quite unceremonious they are always escaping — M. Faisandé would say, —

“Hum! hum! oh, my dear fellows, that is shocking! you are going too far.”

I may be mistaken, but I would wager that M. Faisandé is a hypocrite. His prudery was quite out of place, and almost insulting to the rest of us, whose speech it censured. In coming to a dinner party composed of men, most of whom were young fellows about town, could this gentleman sup-

pose that he would not hear broad jokes? There is nothing more tedious than those persons who seem to wish to throw a wet blanket over the cheerfulness of a party. When people behave like that in jolly company they should be politely shown to the door.

What would you think of a doctor who kept exclaiming throughout a repast, —

“Don’t eat so much, you will make yourself ill; don’t eat that, it is indigestible; don’t drink that wine, it is too heady.”

But, far from so doing, at table the doctor disappears, or he allows you to do as you please; there is no one more accommodating, even to his patients. If the doctors are so indulgent to the fancies of my appetite, by what right does a pedant or a milksop seek to limit my wit or condemn my conversation? There is an ancient proverb which says, “one must laugh with fools,” or, if you like it better, “one must howl with wolves,” from which I conclude that it is not good taste at a repast like this to appear disgusted at a free jest, and this M. Faisandé’s virtue seemed to me very doubtful, to say the least.

In my review of the guests, we must not forget M. Dumouton, although I have as yet only met him two or three times. He is a man who does not seem to suit everybody. Not that he is disagreeable in appearance; on the contrary, he is a tall, thin man, rather good-looking; his face is amiable, his

strongly marked features show a good deal of character; his black, sparkling eyes and high color indicate a man of middle age, although there is nothing middle-aged in his speech. But poor Dumouton is always dressed in so peculiar a manner that it is impossible to augur well for his fortune.

Imagine a shabby coat, green, fading to yellow, which is made in the fashion of a dozen years ago, that is to say, short in front; the tails also are short and narrow and barely hide the seat of his trousers, which are olive and do not come down to his instep, while they squeeze his thighs and knees like a dancer's tights; boots entirely devoid of blacking, and muddy; add to this a Scotch plaid waistcoat, which crosses over and hermetically seals his chest, and a black necktie twisted into a string; no shirt collar, no gloves, a beard which is usually several days old; such is M. Dumouton's ordinary attire.

You may perhaps think he has dressed differently to dine with us, but you are in error; the gentleman does not seem to like to change. Perhaps he has his reasons for that. Today, however, he has made some little additions; he has a sham collar and a white muslin cravat, the ends of which are tied into a great bow which stands out from his dirty coat and waistcoat. I don't know why it seems to me that I have seen that cravat before at a window where it served as a sash curtain, it is a nasty thought, and I do my best to repress it; but you know ugly thoughts are less easy to drive away than

good ones, and every time my eyes fall on the ends of that monstrous cravat it seems to me that I am near a window.

I must now tell you what this gentleman who dresses so shabbily is; I shall astonish you if I tell you he is an author, a "real author," as the children say, a man who writes his own plays—he has not the means to buy them—and plays that are often pretty, which have been played, and which will be successfully played again.

However, you will tell me we don't live in those times when men of letters, playwrights, could hardly earn enough to clothe themselves. Today the stage leads sometimes to fortune; but that does not mean that all the nurslings of the Muses succeed. They may have misfortune, illness, may misconduct themselves; and once in hot water it is difficult to get out of it unless one has a firm will, unshakable resolution, great courage and even greater industry; and everybody has not that. I don't know what was the matter with M. Dumouton or what reverses he had experienced; I don't even know what was his exact position; but to judge from his costume it is impossible not to suppose that he had known adversities, and then the few words that Dupréval had let fall in regard to that literary man returned to my memory. He always said in speaking of Dumouton, "Poor fellow, he's always fearfully hard-up, he has much talent, however; but what management!" From all of which I conclude that

Dumouton is an author who is poor. I don't say a poor author. I am always delighted to meet him, for he is cheerful, witty and not at all pretentious, and what matters it to me if his coat be shabby? I see around this table several individuals who are very well dressed, but who would be nothing without their fine clothes.

I have made you acquainted with the persons who are not strangers to me. As to the other guests, by Jove! if they say anything which shows they are worthy of notice we shall easily hear it.

You are aware that all eyes were fixed on me, and that their owners were awaiting what I was about to say to justify or amplify what I had already advanced on the subject of men who loved several women at the same time. I confess that instead of thinking how I should answer these gentlemen I was occupied in looking at Dumouton, who was causing everything to disappear from the dessert dishes placed within his reach, but was not eating. Finding nothing more to take on the neighboring dishes, he attacked one of those surrounded with cardboard, which they usually cover with icing or pastry and which nobody touches because one of them will serve to appear at dessert for several months. I saw one of the waiters look furiously at him on seeing him pull one of these dishes to pieces, and said to myself, —

“Is this poor Dumouton in the same position as Frédéric Lemaître in the ‘Joueur,’ when he puts

bread into his pocket, saying, 'That's for my family.'"

"Come, Rochebrune, is it for today?" said Dupréval to me.

"What do you mean?"

"What you were going to say."

"Oh, excuse me, my dear fellows; but wait, I think the wine we have drunk has muddled my memory and it would be very difficult for me to remember what you said just now. Besides, instead of lecturing on the best way of loving—which proves nothing, because each one has his own manner, which is the best for him—it seems to me it will be a great deal more amusing for us each to relate one of our adventures, old or new, the choice being left to the one who tells the story. What do you say, messieurs?"

My proposition was welcomed with lively applause. M. Faisandé was the only one who made a slight grimace as he muttered,—

"Devil take it, messieurs, in telling your love affairs you are entering upon a very delicate topic. Such things as that, it seems to me, are usually not told. Discretion, messieurs, is the duty of a gallant man."

"By Jove! M. Faisandé, when one names nobody, one is not guilty of an indiscretion, and since everyone has the right to relate his ancient history, how the devil do you think a man is to recognize any of the actors?"

"This M. Faisandé is extremely strict and very modest," murmured my neighbor, fat Rouffignard, "he's very wrong to risk himself with worthless fellows like us."

"The more so," said Montricourt, "as the gentleman bores everybody insufferably. Come, fellows, Rochebrune's proposition being adopted, who is going to begin?"

"Why, you, Dupréval, the honors belong to you."

"I'm quite willing; then it will be my neighbor on the right, and so on around the table."

Dupréval emptied his cup. I looked at Dumouton; who had entirely rifled an epergne and kept his hands hidden under the table. As some conversation was still going on, Dupréval struck his glass with his knife, shouting, "Silence, messieurs." They drank, were silent, and listened to the host, who began as follows, —

"At the time of which I am telling you I was a clerk of the third rank in a lawyer's office, and often had empty pockets. My father gave me six francs a week for my eating expenses, which you may conceive had to be on a very narrow margin, and it often happened that I spent on a Sunday the whole of my money. Then I was obliged during the week to procure some meals gratis, or restrict my appetite altogether. I think that is disagreeable at any age."

"One fine day, or rather one evening, I was at

a play behind two very pleasing grisettes. They still had grisettes then; now, you know, they have unfortunately disappeared from the face of the globe, like pug-dogs and market-garden melons. For my part, I greatly regret them—not the market gardens or the pug-dogs, but the grisettes; now they are replaced by fast women, who do not come up to them at all.

“Our friend Dumouton has written a little paper on grisettes, lorettes, and fillettes, which is very amusing. I shall beg him to recite it to you just now and —”

“Come to the question.”

“The orator is departing from his subject.”

“Yes, that’s correct, my dear fellows, excuse me. I was at the play then, behind two grisettes, and I had only three sous in my pocket; that was all that remained to me after having paid for my seat, and it was Monday night; that was my position. That did not prevent me from flirting with one of the damsels, whose little saucy face was very seductive to me. For her part, she answered promptly to my oglings. The fire was equally well fed on both sides and promised to grow very warm presently. I had opened the conversation, and they had responded. The damsels were not at all prudish; they laughed a good deal at each joke which escaped me, which occurred frequently. That was the only kind of capital I had. It was in summer and was very warm in the theatre.

"My grisettes had already wiped their faces several times, exclaiming, —

" 'Heavens, how warm it is.'

" 'How I should like something to drink.'

" 'That's so, I could take something refreshing, no matter what, pure or with water.'

"When the young women said that, I pretended to sing under my breath and looked around the theatre; with my three sous I could have offered each one of them a small stick of barley-sugar, but that would hardly quench thirst. I remember that an orange-woman, who was selling her fruit in the theatre, obstinately persisted in passing in front of us and offering me her basket. I stepped on her foot so heavily that the poor old woman turned pale, and went off uttering loud exclamations.

"At length, the play finished, my grisettes went out. I followed them and continued to chat with them, but was careful to linger behind whenever we passed a café. The young women did not live together, so I had a tête-à-tête with the one that I was courting, and made an appointment with her for the next day at dusk.

"The next day I was not any richer, for my fellow students were for the greater part as poor as myself. Nevertheless, I went to my rendezvous, still having my three sous in my pocket.

"My sweetheart was prompt. Upon this evening I walked her for two hours at least about the streets. She kept telling me that she was tired,

but instead of answering her I passionately pressed one of her hands in mine, and the warmth of my love caused her to forget her fatigue. Unluckily, my sweetheart lived with an old father, or an old mother, so it was impossible for me to go in with her, and I had to leave her at the door.

“The next day we met again at dusk. I managed to lead my sweetheart outside the barrier. The weather was fine, and we walked about on the new boulevard. I wanted to take my conquest into the country. She resisted under the pretext that she was tired; she expected, of course, that I would offer her a cab, but I was careful not to do so. The day following, a new appointment. My grisette wanted to go to the Jardin des Plantes; we got to the bridge of Austerlitz, there it was necessary for me to spend two of the three sous I possessed, and without taking anything. That seemed hard to me, but there was no way of getting out of it. We walked about for quite a long time in this garden, the favorite haunt of lovers, because there are always solitary paths. My conquest was amiable and affectionate, but I hardly answered when she spoke or when she addressed a question to me; I was pursued by a secret uneasiness. I was thinking of our return to the Austerlitz bridge, that we would have to pass again to go back home, for that was our road, and I said to myself, —

“‘I’ve nothing but five centimes, shall I pay her way and let her go alone, or shall I take her home

by another way? Shall I run over the bridge and brave the old soldier?’

“All this was not very promising, and you may imagine that my mind was in such a state that my young girl kept saying to me, —

“‘What are you thinking about, monsieur? You don’t answer what I say to you, you seem occupied with something besides me, you are not very amiable this evening.’

“I forced myself to become chatty, gallant, attentive, but a few moments later I fell again into preoccupation. Then my grisette, impatient at seeing me thus, cried that she wanted to go home, that walking tired her, that for some days I had made her walk so much that her heels were swollen as if she had chilblains. In short, she led me towards the entrance. That was the fatal moment. I began to speak of a new road that I knew and which was a great deal more agreeable than the one by which we had come, but, in her turn, my grisette paid scarcely any attention to me, and when we had left the garden and I wanted to lead her to the left, she resisted, exclaiming, —

“‘Where are you going now?’

“‘I assure you that we shall find the other bridge pleasanter and shorter.’

“‘You are joking, I think, to go back by the streets instead of along the boulevard, you are making game of me, monsieur.’

“There was no way of making her change her

resolution. She had dropped my arm and was walking straight to the bridge.

“‘Come,’ said I to myself, sighing, ‘there’s nothing for me but to do it.’

“I followed her; when she reached the invalided soldier I threw my last sou on the desk, and said to my sweetheart,—

“‘You go on, I’ll follow you.’

“My grisette passed on to the bridge, thinking that I had remained behind a moment for some cause or other, and I looked at the river, asking myself if I could swim as far as the other bank; but I’m not much of a swimmer, and I did not feel the courage of Leander, although the Seine is not as wide as the Hellespont. Instead of swimming, I began to run along the quay until I had reached the neighboring bridge. I arrived there hardly able to breathe, which did not prevent me from running across the bridge. Then I went back along the border of the Seine that I might reach the entrance to the Boulevard Bourdon, but it was a long way around and, although I had run nearly all the way, it had taken me a good deal of time.

“At length I reached the place, but in vain I sought my sweetheart. I did not find her. Tired of waiting for me, piqued at not seeing me come back, she had returned alone to her dwelling. The next day I went to our customary place of meeting, but she did not come. I awaited her there for several days, without success, and at length I

wrote to her, begging her for an answer. She sent me a very laconic one, —

“‘You have made fun of me,’ said she, ‘and after having tired me out for four days as if I were an omnibus horse, you left me planted in the middle of a bridge. I’ve had enough of it, monsieur, you will walk with me no more.’

“Thus ended this intrigue, for I never saw my grisette again, which did not prevent me from preserving the memory of this adventure. Let it serve you as a lesson, messieurs, if you should find by any chance that you have only three sous in your pocket.”

CHAPTER II

BLINDMAN'S BUFF. AT THE WINDOWS. IN A
BALLOON. THE LOST KEY. FILLETES,
GRISETTES AND LORETTES

DUPRÉVAL's story had greatly amused the company ; M. Dumouton, who perhaps better than any one else understood the situation in which our host had found himself, exclaimed, —

“ Oh, yes, it is very dangerous to venture with a lady when one has no money in one's pocket ; that's the thing that I always avoid.”

It was now young Balloquet's turn. The big, fair young man opened his great mouth as if he were about to sing a piece from a grand opera and began to speak, —

“ Gentlemen, Dupréval has just related to us an adventure which can hardly be called a lucky one, for it did not turn out happily for him ; now I am about to narrate one which can truly be called good fortune of the first order.

“ It occurred at a party given by one of my friends at his estate near Sceaux — ”

“ Name no places,” said M. Faisandé, interrupting Balloquet ; “ it is unnecessary, and may cause some of your personages to be recognized.”

“By Jove! M. Faisandé, you are very much alarmed lest anyone should guess. Are you afraid your wife will be brought in question?”

The Treasury clerk turned the color of a poppy and exclaimed, —

“Monsieur Balloquet, I don’t know how you dare venture on that kind of pleasantry — it is in very bad taste, monsieur!”

“Then let me speak and don’t come and stick your oar into what I am saying. Your false modesty doesn’t impress me at all; the people who pretend to be so decent and are so correct in their conversation are often more debauched, and are greater libertines than those whom they censure—”

From the color of a poppy M. Faisandé passed to that of a turnip; but he made no answer, he even hung his head over his plate, which made us think that Balloquet had struck it right. The latter resumed his speech.

“I was at a delightful country party. There were charming women there, and among others one with whom I had been very much in love for a long time, but to whom as yet I had said only a few fervid words now and again; you see her husband was a man who, without being at all jealous, was continually with his wife, with whom this dear fellow was very much in love. He wearied her with his caresses. Sometimes he so far forgot himself as to kiss her before everybody, which was very bad form; and by this means he had managed to render himself

unbearable to his wife. Yes, my dear fellows, that fits in with what I was saying to Fouvenard just now. Women don't like to be loved too much. 'Excess in anything is a defect.' And, besides, nothing makes anyone look so stupid as to love dotingly. So, as they were playing and running about the garden, M. Trois-Étoiles — I shall call him Trois-Étoiles, hoping that that will compromise nobody — had again kissed his wife before the company, and she, furious at this, had made a scene and forbidden her husband to come near her for the rest of the evening. The dotting husband was in despair, and sought a way to become reconciled to his wife. After thinking for a long time he took me by the arm and said, —

“‘My dear M. Balloquet, I think I have got what I was seeking.’ ‘Have you lost anything then?’ I answered. ‘You don't understand me, I was seeking some way by which I could oblige my wife to let me kiss her, which is rather difficult, because at this moment she is sulky with me. But this is what I have thought of: I am going to propose a game of blindman's buff, and I shall ask to be the blindman on condition that I may kiss the person I catch if I can guess who she is. Whenever I catch my wife, be kind enough to cough, that I may know her; in this way I shan't be mistaken, and she will have to let me kiss her.’

“I strongly approved of M. Trois-Étoiles' plan; his idea of playing blindman's buff seemed a good

joke. He proposed the game, they accepted, and put the bandage over his eyes; but while he was groping about, the company thought it would be funny to leave him there and go to another part of the garden. I took Madame Trois-Étoiles. The garden was very large and full of grottos and labyrinths and very thick shubbery. I shan't tell you exactly where I took the lady, but our walk was a long one, and when we got back to the point we started from the poor husband was still searching with his bandage over his eyes. As he heard us approaching, he came quickly towards us; I coughed, it was the least I could do to procure him this satisfaction. He named his wife, and kissed her. Then, delighted at his idea, he bandaged himself again and insisted on being 'it.' We yielded to his desires, and he did the same three times following. That, my dear fellows, is what I call a regular love adventure — a stroke of luck!"

"Your story is quite after Boccaccio's style," said Montricourt, laughing. "If they are all like this, messieurs, we can write a sequel to the *Décameron*."

"It's Fouvenard's turn."

The hairy man passed his hand over his forehead and said, —

"My dear sirs, I must try to remember. I've had so many adventures that I am afraid of getting them mixed up one with the other. You know how it is when you ask someone who knows a good many songs to sing, and he can't remember one

though he knows so many. I beg you to keep me for the last ; meanwhile, I'll straighten myself out and I'll try to choose something nice and spicy."

"So be it. Fouvenard resigns his turn to M. Reffort. Go on, Reffort."

The personage they call Reffort is an individual who has not said four words during dinner, and is content to laugh rather stupidly at what others say. This gentleman, whose face is no more than insignificant, became very red when they told him to speak. He rolled his eyes at the dessert, played with his knife, and at last muttered, —

"By Jove ! my dear sirs, I am greatly embarrassed at having to speak, because, I must confess to you, upon my word of honor, it has never happened that — er !"

"What has never happened to you, Reffort, what do you mean by that ? Explain yourself."

"Can it be that M. Reffort is a male Joan of Arc ?" cried Rouffignard. "If so, I demand that he be moulded, that they make a statue of him, and that it be sold for the profit of the Temperance Society."

Shouts of laughter came from all sides, M. Reffort joining in, although he looked a little vexed, and at length he resumed, —

"My dear fellows, you go too far ; I did not mean to say what you think, but merely that I am not a man of adventures — I should not know how to comport myself in such — and —"

“Very well, M. Reffort, we’ll ask nothing further of you ; we’ll call your story told and pass on to another.”

The gentleman who came next said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, —

“Messieurs, the happiest day of my life was that on which I picked up a garter at a wedding at the Prés-Saint-Gervais. I made a mistake, but I never saw so pretty an ankle as the one I took to be the bride’s. In short, I should have liked to remain under that table forever. Unhappily, the limb in question belonged to a lady of over fifty, but she was kind enough to make me a present of her garter.”

“And you have worn it on your heart ever since?”

“No, but I put it under a glass shade. That is my sole love adventure.”

“I, messieurs, was shut up for twelve hours in a cupboard in the wall which contained bottles of liqueur ; when my mistress at last was able to take me out, I was completely drunk ; I had tasted a little of everything to while away the time. When she saw me in that state my lady was obliged to send for a messenger, who loaded me on his back like a bundle and, in going downstairs, he let me roll a whole flight. Since that time, I have a horror of love adventures.”

“It’s your turn now, Raymond.”

“I was once very much in love with a lady who

lodged opposite me. As you may imagine, I was always hanging out of my window. The lady was very pleasing, but she did not respond to my oglings; she often went so far, indeed, as to leave her window when I was at mine. All that did not discourage me. I followed the lady everywhere, into the streets, into omnibuses, to the theatre; I had written twenty notes, not one of which she had answered, and my persistence seemed rather to displease than to touch my neighbor's heart. Not knowing what to do next, I bethought myself one day that I would try the effects of a little jealousy, so I went in search of a young woman, who, for a price, came to my place one afternoon. I put her on my balcony, where she was in full sight of the lady opposite, bade her behave decently and awaited the effect of my expedient.

"My neighbor appeared at her window. It was impossible for her not to see my dame on the balcony. I was delighted, I said to myself, 'She sees me with another, she must be vexed.' What was more, the person I had hired was quite pretty and would have passed as a very agreeable woman, and, following my orders, she had dressed herself elegantly. But how could I guess that she would begin to smoke an enormous cigar, a real panatella? I tried to oppose this; but she answered that it was very good form. I had yielded the point as to the cigar, when suddenly she shouted to a young man who was passing along the street, —

“‘Monsieur Ernest, don't expect me at your studio tomorrow to pose for Venus. I'm posing here, where they pay me double, and I don't have to catch a cold in my head, or somewhere else, by standing naked, as I do at your place.’

“Judge of my despair! My neighbor had heard it all and was laughing till she cried. As you may imagine, I immediately dismissed my poser. But now, see how strange women are! The following days I was so disappointed and ashamed that I did not dare show myself at my windows. Well, then my neighbor deigned to answer one of my letters, and I became the happiest of men.”

“You might call that ‘The Intrigue at the Windows.’ Now, Roland.”

Monsieur Roland, a jolly fellow with big whiskers, with all the assurance and dash of a commercial traveller, sat up straight and began, —

“I was in love with a lady who resisted my advances. One day, I managed to go up with her in a balloon. Once in the air I said to her, ‘My darling, if you are still so hard-hearted, I'll burst the balloon and we shall be killed together.’ The lady yielded, and I assure you, my dear fellows, that it is very agreeable to spoon in a balloon.”

“I demand a repetition of that!”

“I ask if this Roland always has an inflated balloon at his disposal, that he may induce hard-hearted charmers to listen to him.”

“What, do you doubt the veracity of my story?”

“On the contrary, it is delightful,” said Montcourt; “only, I was thinking what I could find to match the balloon.”

“I, messieurs,” said a tall gentleman who wore blue-glass spectacles, “as I have very short sight, my love affairs nearly always have a vexatious ending. I pay attention to a young lady; when I go to her house the next day I throw myself at her mother’s feet and make the tenderest speeches to her, thinking I am addressing her daughter. However, a lady whom I was ardently cultivating, consented one day to come to breakfast with me. Only she said, — ‘Be sure not to put on your spectacles, for I think you look frightful in them; I hate the things! To please my conquest, the next morning, after having ordered a dainty breakfast and dressed myself as gallantly as possible, I took off my spectacles and awaited the visit which was to make me the most fortunate of mortals. At length someone knocked at my door. I ran and opened it, holding my arms out in front of me, for it was difficult to distinguish objects, I was so very short-sighted; but it was a woman who came in, I was sure it was her gown I had felt. I did not leave her time to speak to me, I was so ardently in love. I took her in my arms and stifled her exclamations with my kisses. At length I heard a voice exclaiming, ‘Good heavens! monsieur, what is the matter with you this morning. You must have been taking something that has got into your head.’ Struck

by her accents, I ran and got my spectacles; I placed them on my eyes. Judge of my disgust, I had been hugging and kissing my portress. The worthy woman had brought me a letter from my sweetheart announcing that it was impossible for her to come. Since then, you may believe, I never make love without my glasses."

This story had made everybody laugh a good deal. A stout gentleman also told us at great length that his only sweetheart had been his wife. We all blessed this gentleman, who deserved the Cross and our esteem.

Monsieur Faisandé's turn having arrived, he drew himself up, assumed an air of gravity, and thus expressed himself, —

"Messieurs, love is not as joyous, as foolish, as you all seem to think; the greater part of you seek to form intrigues for the mere sake of amusement. It is a very serious thing and sometimes has very doleful results —"

"Monsieur Faisandé, you are libelling the sentiment which lends a zest to life, which —"

The Treasury clerk compressed his lips and resumed, weighing each word, —

"Messieurs, I have had no love adventures; now that I am married, I'm not likely to begin."

"What a hypocrite!" murmured my fat neighbor. I don't know this gentleman's wife, but I pity her; for I am sure she has a very disagreeable man for her husband."

“What, M. Faisandé, not a little laughable incident to tell us?” said Balloquet. “Come, think well, has nothing happened to you in the Cité quarter—in the Rue aux Fèves or Saint-Élois? There is plenty of gallantry going on in those streets, however.”

Monsieur Faisandé turned green this time; he did not know where to look, and stammered something that no one could understand. Dupréval, seeing this gentleman’s confusion, and desiring to put an end to a scene that threatened to be anything but comical, hastily begged Montricourt to take the floor.

For some moments the latter stroked his beard, then, assuming a serious expression, said to us, in a low voice, —

“My dear fellows, I am going to tell you something which perhaps will seem rather hard to believe. You must know that I have made some wings, yes, messieurs, a pair of fine wings like those of an eagle. I attach them to myself under the arms, and then, you understand, I can go where I like? When a woman attracts me, I can go in at her window, even if she lives on the fifth floor; I carry her off and make love to her in the air. It is amazing.”

“Permit me to say,” said M. Roland, mockingly, “that while you are coquetting in the air, you cannot work your wings, and you fall. Look at the birds, they do their billing and cooing on the ground.”

“I foresaw your objection, my dear fellow, and

so before flying am always careful to attach myself under your balloon, and it holds me up."

This pleasantry put all the laughers on Montri-court's side, and M. Roland confessed himself out-done.

It was my turn to relate my adventures. I have had both merry and sad ones, but, considering that the sentimental would be ill-fitting at this moment, I settled on the former.

"My dear fellows, the scene took place in the country, in a country where there was everything to afford comfort, about five leagues from Paris. I had gone to pass a fortnight with a friend who had a house there. My friend was ill with consumption and lived on milk only. I leave you to imagine whether his house was cheerful; but one must sometimes make sacrifices for friendship's sake. Then there was a house in the vicinity where several tenants lived, among them a charming young widow whom I had already met in Parisian society; she was a blonde with sentimental blue eyes and a languorous smile, and was rather coquettish. 'The idea!' you will say, 'all women are'; but there are some exceptions. I renewed my acquaintance with her; in the country, as a man has a great deal of time to himself, Cupid does his business more quickly than in the city; and then the pleasant shade of the foliage, the verdure, the delightful nooks, where nothing is heard but the singing and twittering of the birds, are not all these made to

invite love? A sweet invitation to which it is so pleasurable to respond. In short, I had pursued my flirtation with the widow with such ardor that it was only a question of obtaining a tête-à-tête, but that was not so easy as you might think. The house in which my fair friend lived was occupied by a number of curious, gossipy, mischief-making people, whose greatest pleasure consisted in busying themselves about what others were doing. In the country that is the principal occupation of fools; they get up to spy on their neighbors, and are not happy when they go to bed if they have not done a little backbiting. They had noticed my attentions to the little widow, they had also agreed among themselves to watch us; and she and I could no longer take a step without the whole country following us. All these bourgeois and country people, who belonged to the cucumber family, were worthy of being guardians of Paris, and some day I shall recommend them to the prefect of police.

“It was necessary, therefore, to act with caution. The house in which my widow lived had a large garden. All the gardens had a small door, and each tenant possessed a key of this little door, which opened into the midst of a beautiful meadow. Several times in the evening, as I talked with my sweetheart, I had begged her to trust me with this key, that I might get into the garden. By going there at midnight, I was sure of not meeting a tenant. All these people usually went to bed at ten o’clock.

My continual refrain when with the lady was, 'Trust me with the key, or open the door to me at midnight.' One evening, in fact, when we were together at one of the neighbors, as she was leaving, my fair dame came up to me, took me by the hand and whispered to me, 'Come tonight.'

"You can imagine my joy, my intoxication. I left the widow as quickly as possible, for fear that she would change her resolution. Everyone went home, I did the same as everybody else. I had to wait some time to know that everyone was asleep. Midnight struck on my friend's old cuckoo clock. Immediately, with a light step, I left my room and the house without making any noise, I directed my steps towards the meadow, I saw the wall, the little door, and seated myself on the grass a few steps away, waiting impatiently until she should open the door by which I hoped to arrive at supreme felicity.

"A half-hour rolled by, the door did not open. I said to myself, 'Someone in her vicinity has not gone to bed yet, of course, and she's afraid to come down. I must wait.' Another half hour rolled by and the door remained closed. I arose and said to myself, 'Suppose she has left the door just on the jar, so that I can go in,' and immediately I ran to assure myself if this were so, but the door was fastened on the inside. I walked about, I sat down again, with my eyes always fixed on the door, which did not open. I thought of everything that might

have stopped her or made the beautiful widow late. However, time passed, one o'clock struck, then the half-hour, then two o'clock. 'She's making game of me,' said I to myself, 'she's not coming. However, what object could she have had in making me pass the night waiting for her? Has my love deserved such a cruel deception? Finally, was it not she herself who told me to come this evening. No, it is impossible that of her own design she would make me pass such wretched hours as these.'

"I could not make up my mind to leave the place. Hoping still, I would say, at the slightest sound that I heard, 'She's coming, here she is,' but the sound would cease and she would not come. Then I would go a few steps away and come back again. Day broke, and at its appearance my last hope fled, for people get up very early in the country, and once daylight had arrived I knew very well that the lady would not venture to come and look for me. I went home to my friend's house with despair in my heart, swearing that I would never again speak to or even look at the woman who had thus made sport of me.

"However, during the next day, chance, or rather our own wills, brought us together. I was about to overwhelm her with reproaches, but she did not leave me time, and casting an angry glance at me, she said, in a voice changed by anger, —

"'Your conduct is shameful, monsieur, to make fun of me in this way ; to cause me to pass the whole

night a prey to the greatest uneasiness, for I had the kindness to imagine that some misfortune must have happened to you ; I see I was mistaken. But why should you ask for something which would no longer please you ? It's shameful, I hate you and I forbid you ever to speak to me.'

"You may judge of my astonishment at this speech. Instead of excusing myself, I broke forth into complaints, reproaches for the night I had passed at the garden door. The manner in which I expressed myself was so honest, so sincere, that my young widow interrupted me, exclaiming, —

'What ! you passed the night in the field — but why didn't you come in, monsieur ?'

"'Come in, and how should I come in, madame ?'

"'Why, with the key of the little door that I gave you myself ?'

"'You gave me the key ?'

"'Yes, monsieur, yesterday, when I spoke to you I put it in your hand.'

"Everything was explained. I remembered well that in whispering to me she had taken me by the hand, and it was then that she had given me the key, or rather that she thought that I had received it ; but, alas, the key had fallen without a sound on the ground, without either she or I perceiving it.

"See, messieurs, what a thread happiness hangs by. I asked pardon and claimed another interview or appointment, but with women an opportunity lost is seldom found again.

“‘Try to find the key again,’ she said.

I ran to the place where, on the evening before, she had spoken to me. Alas, I sought in vain. I scratched the grass, I explored even the slightest tufts of verdure. I did not find the key. A short time after, the fair lady left the country and I never saw her again.”

I had accomplished my task. We had only to hear Dumouton and Fouvenard. The latter having asked to speak last, the literary man in the yellow-green coat gracefully saluted us and began his speech,—

“Gentlemen, to speak of love adventures is to speak of women, which is for me to speak of fillettes, grisettes or of lorettes, for as to shopkeepers or great ladies, married or unmarried, I always thought them too virtuous to be addressed by me. That is my opinion; opinions are free. Permit me, therefore, a slight digression in regard to fillettes, grisettes, or lorettes. I know well that my colleague Alexandre Dumas has also treated this subject; but there are themes which are inexhaustible, which are always pleasing and interesting; women and love are thus happily privileged.

“Someone has said that Paris is the paradise of women. Ah, messieurs, in order to be able to affirm that, he could not have visited the little chambers, closets, the attic rooms, sometimes the garrets even, where this charming sex too often lack the prime necessities of life either through their own faults or

through that of fate, or rather by the acts of those monsters of men who play such a prominent part in the histories of these young ladies.

“The fillettes of Paris are the children of decent small shopkeepers or mechanics. The parents, too much taken up with their work or the cares of their business, either apprentice these girls or place them in a shop, or more often leave them at home to do the housework and take charge of the house.

“You will see a young lady of fourteen to sixteen, who has just left school, and who suddenly, because her father has become a widower or because her mother is busy all day behind a counter, has to take charge of the household; they do not give her a maid to assist her, for if she had a maid she would be a demoiselle and no longer a fillette. Demoiselles have received an education, their parents have given them masters, they have tried to enlighten their minds, their judgments, to form their characters. In fact, demoiselles ought to know a great number of things; but they have the right to do nothing all day long merely because they are demoiselles.

“Fillettes, on the contrary, must do everything, and very often they are thought nothing of, so let us see how they manage a house that has fallen into their hands, these children who only yesterday were nursing their dolls. Usually, they begin by sweeping early in the morning, but even if the lodging consists of but one room and a closet the house-

work is not finished till the end of the day—if it is finished. It is true that the fillette cannot stay long at any one thing; at every turn she must change her occupation; she does not even dress herself fully. The fillette is the young person you meet early in the morning in the street, with slippers down at heel, with tangled hair, untidily dressed, with modest face and dirty hands.

“She begins to sweep, but suddenly she lets go of the broom, which sometimes falls into a pane of glass and breaks it; but this doesn’t in the least trouble our housewife. She wants to take out her curl papers; she takes out two, and is about to begin on the third when she remembers that she has not yet skimmed the soup, runs to get the skimmer, and gesticulates with that article of kitchen furniture as she hums one of Guido’s ballads,—

Alas ! he has fled like a shade.

“And to give expression to her song, and charm to her voice, she often tenderly presses the skimmer to her breast. But as she sings, her glances are often carried towards the canary’s cage; she runs to it, for she remembers that she has not given her bird anything to eat for two days. However, just as she is opening the cage, she thinks she would do well to have some lunch herself; she leaves the canary, to visit the pantry. Finding nothing there that pleases her, she goes down to buy some fresh eggs.

“But on the way she changes her mind; she likes

jam best, so she goes into the grocer's, there she meets a young person with whom she had been at school. They chat together, and sometimes for a long while. The friend says to her,—

“‘Come into my place for a moment, I live not two steps from here, and I’ll show you a gown my betrothed has sent me from Lyons.’

“‘Oh, you are engaged; then you are going to be married.’

“‘Yes, in two months.’

“‘Ah, that’s strange.’

“‘What is strange?’

“‘Why, they are not thinking of marrying me at all.’

“‘You are too young.’

“‘I’m only a year younger than you are. But my parents would rather keep me at home that I may do the housework.’

“‘Come, I’ll give you some sugared almonds that were given to me when I stood godmother.’

“‘You stood godmother! Ah, you are fortunate; you have all sorts of good luck!’

“It is very difficult to resist a friend who offers sugar-plums. The fillette forgets her kitchen, her soup, her bird, and even her lunch, in gossiping with her old schoolfellow who has been a godmother and is engaged to be married.

“At length, when the fillette returns to her dwelling, just as she is going into the house she is accosted by a young man with a very honest face

whom she always meets when she goes out. I leave you to imagine at what time the housework will be done and the soup skimmed.

“This young man is not yet a lover, but seems to be very much in love with her, and if, in the course of time, misfortune comes to the girl whose fault is it? Is she to be blamed? Is it not rather the parents who give too much freedom to beings who have neither strength nor reason nor experience to withstand the temptations of the world?

“Messieurs, Paris is swarming with these fillettes; some of them remain virtuous, although living in the midst of dangers. As they have no fortunes they cannot always marry, and they pass from the state of a fillette to that of an old maid without knowing how to keep a house any the better for that.

“As for the grisettes, that is quite another thing; the grisette loves pleasure, she wants it, and she must have it. She has at least one lover—when she has only one she is, for a grisette, very commendable. As for that, these damsels do not make themselves out any better than they are; they do not assume false virtue, they are neither prudish nor strait-laced nor shy; they cultivate students, actors, artists, plays, open-air balls, or those which are not in the open air, the promenades, tea-gardens, restaurants, and they do not draw away from the private room.

“Grisettes are greedy, they are nearly always hungry. They are mad after truffles, but they would

just as soon stuff themselves with potatoes. They adore meringues, but they feed daily on cake and gingerbread; they would climb a greased pole for champagne to drink, but they will not refuse a glass of cider.

“When you have paid for a handsome dinner for a grisette, you know, as well as I do, my dear fellows, that you must not imagine her appetite is satisfied. On leaving the table, if you are in the country, she wants to draw on the red or black for maccaroons, of which she swallows several dozen; then she asks for milk to drink and a hunch of brown bread to dip in it; later on she wants cherries, and after that, beer and croquettes. In Paris, she wants sticks of barley-sugar, glasses of chocolate, punch and Italian brawn.

“Let us render justice to the Parisian grisette, she is light and flippant, dashing, alluring and provoking in her manner. She is not always pretty, but she always has a certain I know not what, a little chic, which always catches admirers. She makes up the most simple materials into pleasing little toilets; she often wears an apron, and nearly always a cap; she rarely puts anything else on her head, and she is right, for her little saucy face, which is very seductive in a cap, loses a good deal of its charm under a bonnet, unless, however, it is only a tiny affair, the brim of which should never pass the tip of her nose.

“The grisette is a dressmaker or a staymaker or an embroiderer or a burnisher or a threader of

pearls, no matter what—she has a trade. In truth, she rarely exercises it. Let anyone suggest a country excursion, a donkey ride, a bachelor's breakfast, a dinner at the Chaumière, a ticket to the play, and she'll send the workshop or the store or the counter walking.

“So long as we can procure her any pleasure, she thinks of nothing else; but when her lover has not a sou, she goes to work quite as gayly as if she were going to dine at Passoir's or to dance a little cancan at the Château Rouge; for do not deceive yourselves, messieurs, the grisette is philosophical, she takes time as it comes, money for what it is worth, and men for what they do for her. She loves ardently for a fortnight; she then thinks that will last her all her life and proposes to her lover to go and live in a dessert or on an island, like Robinson, and subsist on vegetables and shell-fish. As she is very fond of radishes and oysters, she thinks she could get used to such a diet; but after a moment she forgets this plan of solitude and cries,—

““Ah, how much I should enjoy some roast veal and some lettuce salad garnished with hard-boiled eggs. Dodolphe, take me to Asnières and we'll have a country dinner; and I will pick some daisies and pluck off the petals and I shall know your sentiments, for daisies never lie. If it stops at passionately, I will kiss you on the right eye, if it tells me you don't love me at all, I'll dig pins into your calves; I hope these are proofs of my love!”

"But Dodolphe is not always in funds.

"'You have no money!' cries the grisette, 'ah, how stupid it is that one must always have money, whether to roam about or to stay at home. But wait! I have a merino gown and a winter shawl; it is summer now, and consequently I have no need of them. These things will be a great deal better at my aunt's¹ than at my place, they'll have more care, and with what they give me we will go and have a jollification.'

"The grisette executes her plan; she takes her effects to the Mont-de-Piété, without regret, without sadness. If she had any money, she would offer it to her lover. As she often makes him spend all that he has, she thinks it natural to spend with him all that she possesses; she is neither avaricious nor economical nor self-interested.

"A grisette's lodging is a very curious place, but she does not always own a lodging; very often she perches right or left. She lives for a week with her lover, three weeks with a female friend, the rest of the time with her greengrocer or her porter.

"When she happens to possess a lodging and furniture of her own the grisette feels a noble pride, even if the furniture is only composed of a couch, a mirror and a broken chair. Then she likes to say,—

"'This evening I shall stay in my own place. Tomorrow I shall not leave home. I think I shall color my room—that's very good style, especially

¹ The pawnbroker's.

yellow; when it is waxed it shows off more than the furniture.'

"It is she who, when she goes out, writes on her door with chalk, 'I'm at my naybor's below.' But the grisette is not supposed to be correct in her orthography, if she used language correctly her conversation would probably seem less droll; there are so many persons who please by their faults.

"Sometimes the grisette ventures to give evening parties. She occasionally goes so far as to invite seven persons. Then the bed serves as a sofa, the shutters as benches, the stove as a table, and the lantern from the staircase is placed on the chimney-piece to serve instead of a lamp. They make punch in a soup tureen, tea in a saucepan, they drink from egg-cups, have one spoon for three, and the shawl of the mistress of the house serves as a tablecloth and to wipe the hands of the whole company, nor does all this prevent them from laughing and amusing themselves; for 'the truest pleasures are not those which cost the most.' This maxim is not new, but it is very consoling to those whom fortune has not favored."

As he said these words, Dumouton sighed and glanced down at himself, but, flattered no doubt by the sight of the ends of his cravat, by the luxury of the linen to which he was unaccustomed, he presently resumed his cheerful expression and his discourse.

"I come, messieurs, to the last part of my trilogy,

to the lorettes, who are grisettes, for the greater part, who belong to what is called 'la haute.' In common parlance, 'la haute' means the society of dandies, men who belong to the Jockey Club, in short, those men who have the fancy and the means to spend a great deal of money on women. The lorettes live in the Chaussée-d'Antin, the Nouvelle-Athénée, the Champs-Élysees, the sporting turf neighborhood, or, if you like it better, that of horse-dealers. They abide ordinarily in the new streets. When a fashionable house is finished, that is to say as soon as the staircase is built and people can go up to the various floors, they have the walls dried by lorettes. These ladies rent a freshly decorated apartment; the owner knows very well they will not pay their rent, but he lets it to them because they will bring people into the house; they will attract other lodgers; not good citizens, fie for shame! but fashionable young men, rich old bachelors, sometimes men who keep their carriages.

"As for that, the lorette is extremely frank in regard to this circumstance. One of these women, visiting a fine apartment which was to let in the Rue Mazagran, the porter, having had little to do with her kind probably, was simple enough to tell her the price, repeating several times that he could not give it for less than fifteen hundred francs. Wearied by the persistence of the porter, the lorette looked at him as if he were a curiosity, exclaiming,—

"Why, monsieur, with whom do you think you

are doing business? What is the use of telling me the price, seeing that I never pay.'

"The lorette dresses elegantly and coquettishly; she perfumes the neighborhood through which she passes. She has superb bouquets, she is gloved with extreme care. At a distance, she might be taken for a lady of the great world; but one has only to hear her speak for that illusion to vanish quickly. Her language is not half so pure as the varnish on her boots.

"The lorette wants to eclipse the grisette, whom she affects to despise, though she does not come up to her. She has no lovers, she has only those who 'keep' her. She is not a kept woman though, for the latter sometimes resides for a long time with the same person, while the lorette is constantly changing. The grisette likes young men; the lorette prefers middle-aged men.

"Places particularly affected by lorettes are the Hippodrome and the Cirque in the Champs-Élysées. During the daytime, they go to admire the bold riders leaping the hedges, or the women drawing chariots in the arena. The public at the Hippodrome being generally fashionable and elegant, especially on week days, these ladies are almost sure to be repaid for their attendance. In the evening they go to admire Baucher, they jump with pleasure on their benches when Auriol does some new perilous leap. The lorette does not cease repeating to her husband (for so she calls her enter-

tainer) that she knows of nothing more beautiful than the horse.

“The lorette gives parties where there are always a good many men and a very few women. They play everything, from loto to lansquenet. These ladies are intensely fond of gambling; but in sitting down at the green cloth they declare to you that they wish to win, so, consequently, it is for you to settle it so. One day at a game of lansquenet, where the bank was held by a pretty lorette, they discovered the damsel cheating and reproached her with it; instead of denying it, she began to laugh, as she answered,—

““Why, good heavens, what does it matter whether I take your money that way or some other?”

“The lorette thinks of nothing but money; you need not go to her house when your purse is empty, her love will have followed your crowns. She will not pledge her effects that she may go a-pleasuring with you.

“The lorette has fine furniture, but she does not pay her upholsterer any more than she pays her landlord. If you take her to dine at a restaurant, she begins by putting on airs. She is not hungry, she likes neither this nor that, such a thing makes her ill, such another is repugnant to her; in the end she gives herself indigestion.

“It is necessary, at least I think so, to take a lorette for a day, a grisette for a month, and a fil-

lette for life when you meet one who can find time during the day to dress herself and do her hair and her housework, to breakfast, to watch her soup and tie her shoe-laces; for then you will have discovered a phoenix or the eighth wonder of the world. To sum up, the fillette craves sentiment, the grisette pleasure, and the lorette money.

“I venture to hope, messieurs, that you will kindly accept this slight study of women in place of a tale of love and adventure; inasmuch as for a long time past fortune has not been kind to me, and as unluckly I have no leisure for the pursuit of gallantry I could tell you nothing worthy of following what I have had the pleasure of hearing.”

CHAPTER III

MONSIEUR FOUVENARD'S NARRATIVE. THE GINGERBREAD-DEALER

EVERYBODY had listened with pleasure to Dumouton's sketch of women, with the exception of M. Faisandé, who without saying anything had risen and gone out while he was speaking. The disappearance of the Treasury clerk did not cause us any lively regret, did not prevent our drinking and laughing and saying everything that came into our heads. But as Balloquet seemed to know something about that extremely modest personage, I made up my mind to question him on the subject; for I wanted to know if I were not mistaken in my conjectures, or if I owed reparation to the gentleman for the evil opinions to which he had given rise in my mind.

Fouvenard was the only one of the company who had not yet related his little adventure. Dupréval, our host, turned towards the gentleman whose features, except the nose, were lost under the beard, whiskers and eyebrows which covered his face as with a wig. M. Fouvenard passed his hand over his forehead and buried it in his mane, saying, —

“I have been looking through my catalogue, but haven’t succeeded in digging anything out, so I’ll simply tell you of my last little love affair. It is still quite new; it is not my very latest good fortune, but it is that among recent ones which is the most spicy, I think; you can judge of it for yourselves.

“Some months ago, finding I had an idle Sunday and undesirous of staying in Paris, which, as you all know, is unbearable on that day, above all in fine weather, for then the streets, the boulevards, the promenades are invaded by people with odd faces, who walk about arm in arm, five or six of them in a row, and render circulation as tiring as it is difficult; in short, I threw myself into the first railway train I came to, and did not even trouble about where it would take me. I was so tired of being in Paris that I should not have cared had it taken me to Belgium; but the journey was short, and I found myself at the pretty village of Sceaux—no, I am mistaken, Sceaux is a town; but the moment I see trees, fields, verdure, I no longer think myself in a town.

“I got out of the train and walked about haphazard. The Sceaux ball, formerly so brilliant and so greatly frequented, had rather lost its vogue. Everything passes away—country balls as well as great empires and beauty. The Vendanges de Bourgogne no longer exists. That cheerful house of entertainment, where people gave so many feasts,

so many ultra-spicy balls; where they danced in the costumes of living pictures; the fortune of which house was begun by its excellent sheep's trotters—that house has closed its doors—let us hope it will reopen them. And the Mériden itself—the Mériden—I shall not insult you by asking if you have been there. What man, no matter how ungallant, has not been to the Mériden, of which the private rooms are so well laid out for fastidious parties? Well, messieurs, that nice little restaurant situated near here has also closed its doors. In fact, there's not one, up to the Cadran Bleu, that has not been demolished. That house, formerly so famous, has disappeared also from the Boulevard du Temple. Really, it is heartrending. Where can we now go to dine when we want to entertain a pretty woman? I tell you with sorrow, messieurs, that good places are getting scarce in Paris; we must go outside its walls now to find the quiet and secrecy and everything comfortable which makes the charm of a tête-à-tête, and one has not always the time to go out of Paris.

“But pardon me for allowing myself these reflections, I will come back to my subject. I had been walking about Sceaux for some time and I noticed that the peasants, dressed in their holiday finery, those at least who seemed to have the intention of diverting themselves and of dancing, were leaving the country and going towards Fontenay-aux-Roses. I inquired of a good woman who was

selling gingerbread, and who seemed to be watching with consternation the almost general desertion of the population — by means of a big goodman, costing four sous, which I bought and paid for, praising at the same time her show of wares, I made myself very agreeable to the gingerbread dealer, —

“‘Where are all these young girls going to, all dressed out in their Sunday best?’ said I, bravely munching the goodman’s feet.

“‘Good heavens, monsieur, is it necessary to ask that? Dang it, they are going to Fontenay, under the pretext that there is a fête there today and that they have a little fair — and a man who jumps, does tricks, silly things in fact; as if it was not a hundred times prettier here! As if the ball here was not a hundred times finer! But the very devil is in them all, and they follow one after the other. There’s no way of stopping them. And you are almost my first customer, I haven’t sold a farthing’s worth the whole day.’

“‘But, then, why do you not do like everyone else? Who prevents you from transporting your stall and your gingerbread to Fontenay-aux-Roses?’

“‘Oh, monsieur, I don’t change my place like all those people. They have been accustomed to find me here, at this same place, for thirty years, and if they did not see me now — above all on Sundays — they would say, “Why, where is Mother Giroux? She must be ill or dead,” and it would be bad for me if they thought that; because, you see, monsieur, I

have customers, though it may not appear so; people from Paris who have the habit of buying for their little ones when they come to Sceaux. And I must not risk putting customers to inconvenience to gain a few more sous one day; one can't lose one's habitual purchasers when one has any, and I have them.'

"I was about to leave Mother Giroux, who appeared to me over proud of having customers, when I saw three young girls coming along, holding each other by the arm and skipping rather than walking. Two of them had the dress and appearance of country girls of the neighborhood; they were attired very coquettishly in white gowns, silk aprons, little caps trimmed with lace and knots of ribbon, and even gloves; yes, messieurs, it is not at all unusual now in the outskirts of Paris to see peasants gloved. They are not yet perfumed, but with time and the railroad it pleases me to think that presently the unsophisticated woman will use scent like her polished sisters.

"My two countrywomen were then carefully rigged out; but, in spite of that, they were very rustic, as was shown by their arms, their feet, and the freckles with which their faces were covered. The girls were not bad-looking, but had nothing very attractive about them except their exceedingly fresh complexions. I did not gaze so long at these damsels as I did at the person who was with them, and whose dress was almost similar to that of her companions.

“ Here it was not the cap which rendered the young girl pretty, it was the way in which she wore it, and it was the same with her other garments. She who attracted my glances might have been nearly eighteen; she was a little above middle height, slender, very supple, for you know that shows in the slightest movements, the same as grace is revealed in the most simple actions. Her features were nothing particularly wonderful, but they pleased at once. She was a fair girl with blue eyes and red lips; her mouth had a delightful laughing expression, where candor mingled with mischief; her teeth were even, and without being altogether pearls encased in rose-leaves, as it is the custom to depict the mouth of a pretty woman, they were irreproachable; her hair, of an almost flaxen color, was fuzzed into little curls. This was notably different to the coiffures of her two companions, which were composed simply of little beau-catchers well plastered on to their temples. In fact, as I was telling you, there was something about this young girl which indicated something beside a continuous sojourn in the country. She must have been to Paris, for not by staying always in a village does a woman acquire the manners, the bearing, the ease which contrasts at once with the heavy agreeabilities of the country.

“ My pretty, fair girl wore a striped lilac and white gown, and also a silk apron; but hers was of gray lilac which harmonized perfectly with her

gown. Her cap was simple, but it was in the very best taste and placed so daintily on the top of her head that it hardly seemed to touch it. Her shoes were black, too, but the feet encased in them were small, narrow, and finely arched; her ankle was slender, but not bony. All this attracted me.

"The girls were passing Mother Giroux, who stopped them, shouting,—

"Well, where are you going to now, all dressed up and as proud as peacocks, without even saying good day to me?"

"The young girls stopped then, and said good day to the gingerbread dealer.

"Good day, Mother Giroux."

"We are in a hurry, we are going to Fontenay-aux-Roses."

"We are going to dance."

"We are going to see the plays, the animals and the monkeys."

"Good heavens, you can see all that here. It's not worth while to put yourselves out for monkeys."

"Oh, leave us in peace, the fête at Fontenay will be very fine. Don't you see how everybody is running there?"

"Everybody is so stupid; when one of them makes a blunder, the others will hang themselves to do the same."

"Ah, she is wicked is Mother Giroux."

"Say, you Dargenettes, do your parents let you go running about like that without them?"

“ ‘ Mercy, nobody is going to run away with us! Besides, Mignonne is with us.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, she’s a fine chaperon, is Mignonne. She’s younger than you are, and turns a man’s head as soon as he looks at her.’ ”

“ Mignonne was the pretty, fair girl in the middle, for she immediately answered with a quite coquettish little smile, and looked at me out of the corner of her eye, as during this conversation I remained standing near the gingerbread stall continuing to attack my four-sou goodman. ”

“ ‘ Madame Giroux, if I am young, that does not prevent me from knowing how to take care of these young ladies—because I have been to Paris and I don’t let myself be taken in.’ ”

“ ‘ You, Mignonne! come, now, I bet you would be more easily taken in than the others. There’s too much sugar about you, you will melt.’ ”

“ ‘ And, besides,’ cried the other two peasants, ‘ we are not afraid of the men, we ain’t. Why, there is nothing alarming about them at all.’ ”

“ Pretty Mignonne drew her companions away, as she cried,— ”

“ ‘ Good-by, Mother Giroux, good-by.’ ”

“ ‘ What, you are not buying even a stick of barley-sugar to suck by the way?’ ”

“ ‘ This evening, as we come back—to refresh ourselves.’ ”

“ The young girls had gone. The dealer lamented loudly the evils of neighboring fêtes. But ”

I had already resolved to see the fair girl called Mignonne again, I wanted first to obtain a little information about her. I began by purchasing a square of gingerbread, dotted with almonds, praising what I was eating in unstinted terms. Mother Giroux, flattered to the softening point, looked at me with an expression which seemed to say, —

“ ‘ Ah, if all the young men who came to Sceaux liked gingerbread as this young gentleman does!’

“ ‘ Mother Giroux,’ said I, carefully squeezing my new purchase into my pocket, ‘ it seems to me you are acquainted with those young girls who have just passed.’

“ ‘ Hang it, I know the whole country and its outskirts.’

“ ‘ They are laborer’s daughters?’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, the two dark ones, the Dargenettes. Oh, they are good girls for all their mocking ways; if anyone was to make too free with them, I’ll answer for it they’d know how to defend themselves, with feet and fists and nails, if need be; they like to laugh, but there’s no shame in that. And, then, their father doesn’t understand joking; old Dargenette is a gardener, and he isn’t pleasant every day in the week. He licks his wife with his stick when she doesn’t walk straight, and I really think he would do as much to his daughters if they didn’t behave themselves. Country women sometimes make rather crude speeches, but we must not judge people by that.’

“ ‘And that other young girl who was with them and whom you call Mignonne — she looks as if she had lived in Paris.’

“ ‘Yes, monsieur, that is quite true. Mignonne is the daughter of a good ploughman of this neighborhood ; but she early lost her father and mother, and then a lady from Paris, having taken a liking to her, took her with her, saying she would give her an education. Mignonne had no one but an old aunt, Mother Landernoy, who wasn’t as rich as she might have been, and so she let her niece, who was then twelve years old, go with the lady. The little one stayed in Paris for three years. I don’t know what they didn’t teach her — to read and write, embroider and do wool work, foolishness in fact, which makes a country girl good for nothing. So when she came back to her aunt it was impossible to make her return to work in the fields. Law! she said that gave her a pain in the back ; she might as well say it was too much bother at once.’

“ ‘But why did this little girl come back here? Why did she leave the lady who had taken her to Paris?’

“ ‘Because the lady died, and then, as you may imagine, her heirs would not keep the girl from Sceaux. They began by turning her out, and Mignonne was very glad to come back to her old aunt.’

“ ‘And has not the young girl returned to Paris since then?’

“‘ No, but I believe it was not that she didn’t want to. You can easily understand that during her stay in Paris she acquired manners, style, a way of talking. Mercy! she’s not a peasant at all. Then mamzelle sets the fashions here. When the other girls want to make themselves a cap, an apron, a fichu, they say, “I must go and ask Mignonne if that will be becoming to me—how they wear that.” And then it is Mignonne here, Mignonne there; it would seem that she is an oracle, neither more nor less. When Mignonne has said, “You mustn’t do that, you mustn’t swing yourself like that, you mustn’t dance on that foot,” oh, there’s no danger that any of ’em will do it. And then as Mamzelle Mignonne knows how to read novels, you can understand that she knows a lot of stories, of adventures; so that whenever she speaks the peasants open their ears, like my donkey when he brays. Why, those Dargenettes were quite proud because Mignonne was willing to go with them to Fontenay-aux-Roses!’

“‘ But how does the young girl employ herself here, since she does not work in the fields?’

“‘ Mercy, she makes caps for the other girls, she’s the milliner of the neighborhood, but her poor aunt can’t have sense for both of them, and what I don’t forgive this young girl is having refused Claude Flaquart, a good match who wanted to marry her, although she had not a sou. Claude Flaquart was head over heels in love with her. You

know the young thing is pleasing, and then her dainty little ways turn the heads of these idiots.'

"And she refused this match?'

"Yes, monsieur, refused a man who has a field, vines, three cows, two calves, rabbits, geese! Why, what does she want? I'd like to know. What does she want? A nobleman? A potentate?'

"And what reason did she give for refusing such a good match?'

"Reason? what did she care for reasons? He didn't suit her, that was the only reason she gave. She said he was a blockhead and that he drank; as if a man who has cows and calves could go wrong!'

"And did not her aunt scold her?'

"Her aunt is too kind — too stupid, rather! Claude Flaquart avenged himself, he married someone else who has more head than Mignonne, and he did well. This is what comes of sending young girls to Paris when they have no fortune to establish themselves there. Mignonne will do something foolish yet with some fine dandy from Paris, I'll wager, and later on she'll regret Claude Flaquart's cottage.'

"Madame Giroux, I am very glad to have bought some of your gingerbread, it is excellent. Whenever I come to Sceaux I shall visit you.'

"You are very kind, monsieur; then you are added to my list of customers, that'll increase my profits. You must buy some with candied peel in it, you would think you were eating oranges.'

“‘That will be for the next time.’

“I knew enough now ; I also took my way towards Fontenay-aux-Roses, which is but a quarter of a league from Sceaux.”

Monsieur Fouvenard drank a glass of champagne in order to take breath ; while we waited for him to continue his narrative, which, to me, was deeply interesting ; I don’t know why I trembled lest this pretty Mignonne should yield to the machinations of this young man, who did not strike me as particularly fascinating. But I am not a woman, and it is possible that his Capuchin’s beard had an attraction that I could not guess. Fouvenard resumed his story.

“It was not long before I found myself at Fontenay ; I had but to follow the people who were going towards the fête. Once there, I said to myself,—

“‘I should be more than unlucky if I should not see Mignonne again.’

“I had been walking about for some time in front of the improvised shops on a kind of square when I perceived my three young girls, still holding each other’s arms and stopping before all the curiosities, games, open-air theatres, and yielding to the gaiety of their age, which was increased by the mocking remarks of Mignonne.

“Most of the young fellows of the neighborhood greeted the young girls with jokes that were rather broad, as is the custom of country people, whose innocence has always seemed to me apochryphal.

The two Dargenettes answered in the same tone ; when Mignonne said anything the peasants did not reply, but went off very confused, and I heard some of them say to each other, —

“ ‘ Oh, when Mamzelle Mignonne has anything to do with it, I’m not clever enough to cope with her ! She’s too sharp, she is ; it is easy to be seen she’s been to Paris.’ ”

“ I drew near the three friends, I stopped at the booths, at the theatres, when they did. Mignonne saw me, and it seemed to me she reddened. One of the Dargenettes said, looking at me, —

“ ‘ Why, here’s the young man who was eating gingerbread at Mother Giroux’s — it’s funny that a man from Paris with a beard like his should eat gingerbread.’ ”

“ I saw Mignonne push the one who spoke. Probably she told her to be still, for I heard nothing further. I had already tried to exchange a few words with them, but they pretended not to hear me and did not answer. However, I saw that they were whispering quite low, and that from time to time they darted a glance towards me to see if I was still there. Finally, they stopped at the place where there was dancing. That was where I was awaiting my young girls. I don’t exactly love dancing, but when it is a question of captivating Nicola’s daughter, or any other, I become an intrepid dancer. As to young girls, they nearly all like dancing, there are some of them who have a positive passion for

it; but if they had to dance without men, rest assured their passion for it would very quickly pass. I have come to the conclusion that the pleasure of skipping about is but secondary, that the dance is an opportunity of showing off one's lightness and grace, for playing the coquette, listening to soft nothings, and often to tender confessions, accompanied by pressings of the hands, in sight of the envious people who are looking on, and who can find no fault with it because it is in the figure. Are you surprised that nearly all women have an innate liking for a ball?

"I hastened to invite Mademoiselle Mignonne for the contra-dance, for the polka had not yet invaded this village. She accepted my invitation with apparent pleasure. We left her friends and took our places. I repeat that nothing more favorable for lovers, or would-be lovers, has ever been invented. I at once entered into conversation with my young girl. I was careful not to go too fast, by telling her like an idiot that I adored her, for she would have laughed in my face, but I allowed her to perceive my surprise at her manners, her deportment, her language. I told her it was impossible that she could have been born in a village, and then she told me what I already knew; but I pretended to hear it for the first time. I did not squeeze her hand, but I evinced the keenest interest in her, and then I invited her for the next contra-dance. At first she made some little objection;

but I insisted and she accepted. I saw she was flattered at dancing with a gentleman from the city.

“When we rejoined her companions, the latter, who had been dancing also, were in a violent perspiration and purple in the face; their partners had left them thus without offering them any refreshment. I hastened to call a waiter, who was selling beer or wine, the only refreshments to be found at a *fête-champêtre*. The beer was brought and the two Dargenettes made no ado about accepting it, and Mignonne saw that it was useless to stand on ceremony. I therefore found myself one of a party with these damsels, but I behaved myself with a decency, a reserve which would have edified M. Faisandé. During the second contra-dance Mademoiselle Mignonne chatted still further, and I perceived that the young girl had not only brought from Paris the pleasing manners and elegance of speech which gave her an advantage over the village girls, but that she had preserved that candor and innocence which are not found in city damsels, even when they have been brought up with the greatest strictness.

“Mignonne was a singular mixture of innocence and knowledge, of frankness and coquetry, of simplicity and of enthusiasm. Her sojourn in Paris, the people she had seen, the reading with which she had taxed her mind, had given her a distaste for the country, although her heart and her mind still had the freshness of a virgin nature.

“Messieurs, you must confess that this little thing was a charming conquest.”

“There was not much merit in making it, by Jove!” cried Balloquet. “This young girl did not want to be a peasant, she would have fallen into the net of the first man from the city who offered—and then your beard must have helped you considerably in your triumph over Mademoiselle Mignonne.”

“How so?”

“Why, because it hides the greater part of your face!”

Fouvenard shrugged his shoulders, threw a ball of bread-crumbs at big Balloquet and resumed his story.

“After the second contra-dance, Mignonne said she would like to walk about. I asked permission to accompany the girls, and I had been so polite that they could not refuse me. I think, too, that they had no desire to do so; the Dargenettes because they liked being treated, and Mignonne because she was flattered at having as her escort a young man from Paris.

“Mignonne refused to take my arm, but I walked beside her. I paid for the three damsels to go into all those spectacles under canvas which are to be seen at a fête-champêtre. At first, Mignonne wanted to refuse, but the two country girls hastened into the strolling theatres and Mignonne was obliged to follow them to avoid being left alone with me.

“Towards the close of the evening we had become like old acquaintances. I had treated them to everything to be had at a fête, and I had even danced with Mignonne’s friends. We left the scene together. It was dark, and this time she accepted my arm. I held my young girl on one side and one of the country girls on the other, the second took her sister’s arm, and thus we walked four in a row; this is what country people like, and it reminded me rather disagreeably of the promenaders in Paris on a Sunday. I should have greatly preferred being alone with Mignonne, but there was no possibility of that.

“The walk back seemed short to me. The two Dargenettes carolled all along the road, singing shockingly false, and murdering the tunes. But Mignonne did not sing, and I began to squeeze rather tenderly the hand that was on my arm.

“Chance willed it that the peasants reached their home before we got to Mignonne’s. They said good-by to her, kissing and laughing; I heard some words they whispered to her, and they concerned me. The Dargenettes said, —

“‘You have made a conquest of this bearded man — take care that he doesn’t elope with you,’ and other things of that kind.

“At last I found myself alone with this pretty girl. You can feel, messieurs, that I became tenderly eloquent and pressing. Mademoiselle laughed at all that I said, but it pleased her. In the first place,

as a general rule a woman does not listen to a man who breathes soft nothings to her if he does not please her. The moment they listen to us, we can be sure of our triumph. I asked her to make an appointment to meet me, she refused. But I declared that I would come and walk about Sceaux every day. Then she answered that she could not prevent me from meeting her.

“In fact, I met Mignonne the next day, then the following day, and every day that week. I spent a good deal of money on the railway, but in order to reap, one must sow.

“At the end of twelve days I had completely turned the head of the little thing, who had decided to follow me to Paris; where I promised her a brilliant future, every pleasure and eternal love. Made-moiselle was very tenacious as to that, for the young girl was romantic. But, you know, it costs us men nothing to promise. I am not quite sure that I didn't even mention marriage; but I don't think I did.

“All that came down to a small room on the fifth floor in the attic of a house in the Rue Ménilmontant. I put in it what was necessary, nothing more, with paper at twelve sous a roll. But I must confess that my sweetheart was not exacting; she desired neither a palace nor cashmeres nor a carriage — my presence was all that was needed to satisfy her.

“This lasted for several months. At the end

of that time, I wanted to get rid of my conquest, I had had enough of her. Had she been reasonable, I would have said frankly, —

“ ‘ My dear, I have loved you, but I no longer love you. Sooner or later all connections like ours come to an end — they never last long ; whether we sever it now or six months hence will make no difference at all. Make another acquaintance, or else return to Sceaux, just as you choose ; I have the honor to bid you good day.’ ”

“ But, I repeat, I had business with a young girl who had not quite understood Paris and its inhabitants, who had seen them through a marvellous prism ; for Mignonne possessed a certain depth of character which astonished me ; she thought in all simplicity that I should never leave her. You will say, perhaps, that I need not have gone to see her again unless I liked ; but, unfortunately, in the beginning of our connection, I had been foolish enough to take her to my rooms, to show her the shop in which I was a partner. If I had let a day or two pass without going to Mignonne’s, what would have happened ? She would perhaps have come to ask for me at home or at my shop, which would have led to very annoying scenes, particularly as I had a partner who was nearly as ridiculous as M. Faisandé, and who thought me a Cato.

“ It was therefore necessary to break with my young girl in such a way as to deprive her of the slightest desire to come to my house. A confi-

dence which Mignonne had made increased still further my wish to end the connection; my sweetheart had informed me that she was about to become a mother. Can you imagine me with a woman and a child on my hands? Confound it, messieurs, put yourselves in my place."

Monsieur Fouvenard interrupted his story to look at us all; but no one answered him and he continued, seeming to feel rather surprised at the deep silence, and the almost grave expression of his auditors.

"I was then seeking an occasion to break the connection. A very violent scene would be necessary, for a German quarrel would not have sufficed to separate me from Mignonne. I had then, and I have even yet, as a friend a handsome fellow who is very successful with the ladies, almost as much so as myself, which is saying a great deal. You must have heard me speak of Rambertin, a commercial traveller who leaves Ariadnes in all the towns through which he passes. He had met me several times during my connection with Mignonne when I was taking my love to the Mabilles or to the Château-Rouge, and had been greatly taken with the damsel of Sceaux. One day he saw me alone and rather sad, and asked me what I had done with my fair girl.

"'Confound it,' said I, 'I wish I had nothing more to do with her, and if you could rid me of her, you would render me a great service.'

“‘Are you speaking seriously?’ cried Rambertin.

“‘Very seriously.’

“‘Then you may consider the business settled.’

“‘But you don’t know how Mignonne worships me. I shall have to take extreme measures to be able to break with her.’

“Rambertin began to laugh, rubbed his hands, and said to me, —

“‘It seems to me that I’m stronger minded than you are, for when it’s a question of breaking off a connection I always have a dozen ways of doing so. You go whenever you like to your sweetheart’s, of course, and probably you have a key to her apartment, to let yourself in after she has gone to bed.’

“‘Of course.’

“‘Give me your key. Tomorrow I’ll have one made like it and the thing will go of itself.’

“The next day, in fact, Rambertin had a key like the one I had lent him, which he returned to me, saying, —

“‘I know where your sweetheart lives ; it’s a house where there is a portress who has five cats, but I’m the same height as you, I shall wrap my face in my cloak, and tonight I’ll go and get into bed with Mignonne. I venture to think she sleeps without a light. I shall be cautious, so that she will not suspect that another is taking your place. You must come there tomorrow morning very early, you have a key, you will come in and you will surprise

me reposing beside her. It seems to me that you will then have the right to be angry, to call her unfaithful and to leave her then and there.'

"I thought this plan immense; it was put into execution. Rambertin's audacity is unequalled. All came out as we had hoped. I went to Mignonne the next morning very early. She was still sleeping beside the person who had replaced me, and suspected nothing, and Rambertin pretended to be asleep also. But I had hardly entered the room when I began to shout loudly, to make a frightful row. I called Mignonne unfaithful, perjured. Oh, messieurs, if you could only have seen the astonishment, the consternation of that young girl. It was an awfully dramatic scene, I assure you. She cried out that she was not guilty, that she was the victim of some odious treachery, but as I had no desire that she should justify herself I left, exclaiming that all was over between us. I confess, however, that I feared Mignonne would wish to see me again, would place herself in my way to try and convince me of her innocence, but several days rolled by and I heard nothing further of her. At last I met Rambertin.

"'Well,' I said, 'it seems to me that the little blonde is quickly consoled and that you haven't had much trouble in making her see reason.'

"'You deceive yourself devilishly,' said Rambertin, 'your Mignonne, on the contrary, is a girl who will not be easily tamed. In the first place, per-

sueded that you thought her guilty, she had made up her mind to go in search of you, to follow you, and force you to listen to her. By Jove! my dear fellow, when I saw how it was, I simply confessed our little trick to lead to a rupture between you. The effect of the confession was extraordinary. The young girl refused at first to believe me, but I proved to her that I was not lying. I had a piece of a letter in which you told me at what café I should find you to bring back Mignonne's key. I showed Mignonne this letter. She could no longer doubt that I was telling her the truth. She said but one sentence, "The infamous man!" But then she no longer spoke of going to find you. "Now," I said to myself, "that she is quite broken off with him, I'll try to obtain my pardon and endeavor to make her understand that I have loved her for a long time and that nothing but my excessive fondness for her would have allowed me to help you in this affair," but without answering a single word, Mademoiselle Mignonne showed me her door and said to me, "Go, monsieur, and never again appear before me, or I will go to the magistrate and inform him of your unworthy conduct." 'I tried to kiss her, but she screamed so loud that several neighbors appeared at the windows. I went; but I shall wait, I shall seize a favorable opportunity and we shan't stop there.'

"That, messieurs, was Rambertin's story, and that was how I broke off my connection with the

young girl from Sceaux. Don't you think that the means I employed was very ingenious? I bet you will follow my example on occasion."

Monsieur Fouvenard turned to look at us all and seemed to await compliments and congratulations, but instead of that everybody was silent, and most of the faces had assumed a grave expression. Upon some of them the gentleman might have seen something else, for I am happy to say his story could find no sympathy among us. As for myself, I had always felt a kind of repulsion for this young man, a repulsion for which I could not account, but which one very often feels in society for such and such an individual. Now I felt a glow of self-satisfaction that I had kept my distance from a man capable of conduct so low, so base as to boast of what he had done to the young girl from Sceaux. The portrait which he had drawn of Mignonne interested and moved me, and at that moment it seemed to me that I should like to know that young girl and make reparation for the infamous treatment of which she had been the victim.

Dupréval, who perceived the unpleasant impression produced by the story of the gentleman with the long beard, and who, of course, did not feel flattered at having that personage for a guest, broke silence first, and said to Fouvenard, in an almost severe tone, —

"You were a long time, Fouvenard, in forging the anecdote you have just related, but, frankly,

you would have done better had you remained silent than to tell us such a story of seduction, of which the denouement is, perhaps, worthy of the regency, but not at all suited to our times or customs, for now in order to break with a mistress it is no longer necessary to throw her into the arms of a friend. Those are old expedients of which you have read in some collection of the time of Cardinal DuBois; but, I repeat to you, you have not been happy in your choice of a subject."

"What! 'old expedients?'" cried M. Fouvenard, passing his hand through his beard, "I have invented nothing, messieurs, I have told the thing just as it happened; the one who doubts it has only to seek Mademoiselle Mignonne, eighty Rue du Ménilmontant, if she still lives there, and it is probable that she will give him a number of details in regard to her perfidious Ernest that I have forgotten. That is my nickname, messieurs, and she always called me by it. I don't know whether my story shocks you, but, in any case, that is all the same to me, I don't care a hang if it does. You make me laugh with your sanctimonious airs; I take lessons from no one, and those who wish to give me one have only to speak. I am ready to answer them."

"Take care, fellows," said Balloquet, laughing, "I warn you that Fouvenard is excessively quarrelsome when in wine. After three or four glasses of champagne he's man enough to defy us all."

"Balloquet, I beg you not to chaff me."

"Ha, ha, the wild boar is bristling."

"Monsieur," said I, in my turn rendered impatient by Fouvenard's manner and tone, "if you are proud of your adventure with the young country girl of Sceaux, it seems to me that we are equally free to blame it. Possibly, that is all the same to you; as for myself, I declare that I have deceived many women, but never would I have employed an expedient similar to yours."

"Confound it, monsieur, perhaps you haven't had to take much trouble to get rid of your mistresses."

"Frankly, I should prefer that to trying your expedients; the one who is deceived is often more interesting than the deceiver, and —"

"You have often been interesting."

Dupréval put an end to our discussion by rising.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I beg you again to receive my adieux as a bachelor."

Everyone rose to go and shake hands with the host. I then perceived that Dumouton took the longest way, for he went all around the table, but for a long time he had been ogling some very fine pears which no one had touched, and in passing by them he seized two, which he managed, not without trouble, to thrust into his pockets, making them stick out like two balloons which, spreading his coat tails open, showed the seat of his trousers to be of a different color from the rest of them.

Everyone said good-by, each one took his hat and prepared to leave the restaurant; but the music still continued, they were then playing a very enticing waltz, which made one long to go and ask a lady to be his partner.

CHAPTER IV

THE WEDDING IN THE FRONT. A PINCH OF SNUFF. A FAMILY SCENE

BALLOQUET and I remained after all the others had left the room in which our feast had taken place. As we got our hats, we looked at each other and stepped about in time, and I think that we were about to take two turns of a waltz together when we heard the sound of a polka that was near to us and at odds with the other music.

"Why, there must be several balls here," said Balloquet to a waiter who was looking at us and smiling.

"Yes, messieurs, there are two weddings. One below us here on the first floor and the other on the same story but in the rooms at the back."

"Oh, they are getting married at the back also?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"What time is it now?"

"Half-past eleven, monsieur."

"The two weddings must be at their height. Are there many people there?"

"A great many, monsieur, it's as much as they can do to dance, they are so crowded."

"Which is the more brilliant wedding?"

"They're both of them very good; however, that at the front is superior, it is in better form."

"I understand; at the back they are more free and easy. One can allow one's self a few fancy steps there. Hang it, if it were not midnight—the idea of going to bed when other people are about to pass the night in amusing themselves, when one hears a good orchestra, well conducted, playing tunes which put springs into one's legs, does that suit you, Rochebrune? Have you no desire to go to one of these balls where they are fluttering about below here? "

"Yes, indeed, I should very much like to go, music sets me dancing."

"What will you wager that I go to one of these weddings?"

"Do you really mean that without knowing anybody you would dare to?"

"Why not, I'll let you see how easy it would be. There are two balls here, I shall go into one. If, by chance, someone should happen to ask who I am, whom I know, then I have my answer quite ready. I was going to the other wedding, opposite, and got into the wrong ballroom, that is all."

"In fact, that is an excuse; you make me want to go too."

"Bravo, that's settled, we'll go together to the ball."

"Then, we know so many people that the devil

would be in it if in a numerous gathering we did not find some person whom we knew. Then, we can whisper to him, 'It was you who brought me here,' and the person will ask nothing better than to oblige us. Besides, we shall dance, and dancers are very valuable at a ball — people will end by paying them — so they will be very happy to have us. Come, what ball do you choose? it is all the same to me."

"And to me also."

"Well, I'm a good fellow, that in the front is more elegant, I will yield it to you and I'll take the one at the back, the more so that I feel disposed to dance a cancan, although it be rather —. Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"We have patent leather boots and fresh gloves. This is great. Waiter, just dust our boots a bit with your napkin. That's it. Now they shine so that you can see your face in them. Patent leather boots are a lucky invention. Come, forward! I don't know whether I'm right, but I have an idea I shall get my money's worth at this wedding. What do you think?"

"Well, I haven't as much assurance as you, but pshaw, after all, we are not among those people who have neither fire nor lodging; and then, as you say, anyone may make a mistake about a wedding. Forward!"

"That's it, forward, march against their cannons."

We went down one flight, Balloquet skipping and humming, I rather dubious but bent on amusing myself. We arrived between the two weddings, we heard the two orchestras.

"Good luck," said Balloquet to me, and he went into the one on the right while I went towards the one on the left. I entered the room where they were dancing, a quadrille was about to begin.

"A fourth couple here," cried a gentleman quite near me, then he looked at me, saying, —

"Will you dance opposite to us?"

"Willingly," said I to this gentleman, and glancing around I saw a lady sitting on a bench. I went up to her and invited her to dance. She accepted, and we placed ourselves opposite the gentleman who had spoken to me. The orchestra started, we did the same, and here was I dancing before having had time to look around me and make acquaintance with this company into which I had so boldly thrust myself. But anyone who was dancing did not seem likely to be suspected. Nobody noticed me, nobody paid any attention to me. It seemed to me that I had taken the best way to get acquainted.

After the first figure I began by examining my partner, whom I had taken by chance, as one might say. Chance had served me very well; I had as a partner a very pretty brunette. Her big blue eyes were at the same time gentle and intelligent,

and I believed them capable of a great many things when they were willing to take the trouble ; a slightly aquiline nose, an agreeable mouth, charming teeth, which she showed often, because she was often laughing ; black hair which fell in long ringlets on the sides, a style of hairdressing of which I was very fond ; all these formed a very attractive whole, and this was what I found in my partner, who was slight, well built, light on her feet and very graceful in all her movements. Then I glanced around me. By the carriage of the ladies, the bearing of the men, and by the dancing of each person, I saw that I was at a distinguished gathering. Not the slightest step that was out of decorum. On the other hand, there was an odor of musk and patchouli. I don't know whether they amused themselves greatly here, but at any rate, they were bored with infinite grace.

I saw a good many ugly women, for in a numerous gathering it is quite rare that ugliness is not in the majority. Does it astonish you after that that a pretty woman should make so many conquests ? If nature created them more often, beauties would receive less homage, but as they are only met from time to time they are noticed more. I saw, however, some women who were good-looking, others who were pleasing, some others whose only attraction was their youth, but search as I might, I saw no one who came up to my dancer ; so I tried to talk so that, through the lady, I might

obtain some information in regard to the married couple and know something of the people I was with, which was quite necessary in my position.

"I am extremely fortunate, madame, to have got here in time to find you disengaged. That must rarely happen, chance must have favored me."

"Why, you see, monsieur, I am less sought after than you seem to think; you only had to present yourself. Did you come alone, monsieur? It seems to me that I haven't seen you before in the ballroom."

"Yes, madame, yes, I have only just arrived."

"What do you think of the bride, very pleasing isn't she?"

I cast my eyes around me in a very embarrassed manner, I saw no one who looked like a bride. My partner, who no doubt perceived my hesitation, resumed, —

"Have you not yet happened to see the bride?"

"By Jove, no, madame, I have just got here and I haven't yet had time to look for her."

"Why, she is down there at the end, seated near the orchestra."

I perceived a young woman in the usual costume, white, bouquet of orange flowers, etc.

"Do you see her?"

"Yes, madame, but why is she not dancing?"

"Because that great, clumsy Archibald stepped on her foot just now and almost crushed it. How

awkward that man is? Anna is obliged to rest during two quadrilles at least (I knew that the bride was named Anna.), —

“Poor Adolph was almost crazy, he wanted to fight M. Archibald.” (“Adolph,” that must be the bridegroom’s baptismal name.) I hastened to answer, —

“I can understand that very well; in Adolph’s place I should have been furious too, because, in fact, on the day of one’s marriage —”

“He’s so fond of his cousin, but after all he couldn’t seek a quarrel with the bride’s brother.”

Devil take it, I thought I should make some blunder. The cousin, the brother, I’m all out; then it is not he who is the bridegroom, I am walking on extremely slippery ground, but I must try to keep my feet. My partner, who was fond of talking, presently resumed, —

“As to M. Dablémar, I believe it is all the same to him, you know how he is?”

This question embarrassed me a good deal. I asked myself, who is this M. Dablémar? and answered with tergiversation, —

“Oh, certainly, it must be almost the same to M. Dablémar, that’s just exactly what I think, above all knowing him as I know him.”

“You are very intimate with him, monsieur?”

“Not exactly, madame, but I know him well enough, however, to have a settled opinion of him.”

“Do you think that he will make her happy, monsieur?”

“Make who happy, madame?”

My pretty partner looked at me in astonishment, exclaiming, —

“You ask me who, why his wife, that good Anna.”

M. Dablémar was the bridegroom then, this time there was no room for doubt, I answered hastily, —

“Excuse me, madame, I meant to say she will be very happy ; at least, that is my sincere opinion.”

“I should like to think that you are not mistaken. I knew Anna at boarding-school. I know that she has an excellent disposition, and a husband would have to be very unsociable indeed for her to complain of her fate, but as for that, frankly, the other was prettier.”

Here I was again very embarrassed. What other lady was she talking about? I turned, I glanced away, but my partner went on, —

“However, they say that he by no means adored her, that he neglected her greatly. You knew her probably, monsieur, since you are a friend of M. Dablémar.”

“Whom do you mean, madame?”

This time my partner looked at me in a very strange fashion. I am sure she must have thought I was an idiot, but she only smiled at me and said, —

"You are absent-minded are you not, monsieur?"

"That is not permissible near you, madame."

This compliment changed the ideas of my pretty brunette and made her look quite amiable. Oh, flattery! it is like calumny, something always remains of it.

"Monsieur, your gallantry cannot prevent me from thinking that you are absent-minded. As for that, perhaps you have your reasons for not wanting to answer me in regard to what I was asking you."

"Ah, well, madame, that is true, I have my reasons, and very strong ones."

"I understand."

Confound it, she was very fortunate indeed to understand. I must confess that this conversation made me feel unhappier than I should have thought possible, because I was extremely averse to being considered an idiot by this pretty woman, who seemed to me to grow prettier each moment. There are some persons who are even more beautiful when looked at closely; it is rather rare, but my partner was among them, and I was greatly afraid that the embarrassment of my manner had given her a very poor idea of me. After a moment, my pretty brunette resumed, —

"Here is M. Archibald going to crush someone else's foot in dancing, perhaps. He jumps about frightfully; I always keep out of his way."

I did not know where the lady saw M. Archibald, and I smiled without raising my eyes.

"Of course you know the lady with whom he is dancing just now."

"No, madame, no, I do not know her."

"Why, it seems to me that you haven't even looked towards him."

"Excuse me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

My partner laughed in a way that made me very uneasy, when she had quite ceased, she said, —

"Good heavens, monsieur, excuse me, I'm very silly to laugh like that."

"Why do you say that, madame? laughing is very becoming to you."

"Why, such a funny idea came into my head that it was impossible for me to keep serious."

"If you'd only tell me what your idea was I should be very much pleased at such a mark of your confidence."

"Oh, I should never dare, for it was you, monsieur, who provoked my desire to laugh."

"So much the better, madame, I am delighted at that."

"Well, I don't know why, but it seems to me that you are very preoccupied about something."

"Since I have had the pleasure of dancing with you, madame, that should not be in the least surprising."

"Oh, monsieur, you are very gallant, as far as I

can see, but allow me to tell you that your pre-occupation has nothing to do with me."

"You think not, madame?"

"Do you know what came into my mind?"

"No, but if you will only tell me."

"You will think I am quite childish, ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, madame, what is it?"

"Well, monsieur, I imagine that you have forgotten your pocket-handkerchief."

I could not help laughing with the lady. So I looked like someone who had forgotten his handkerchief. In fact, the persons who are deprived of that useful article do generally look very unhappy, very uneasy. Yes, the lady had good grounds for thus accounting for the faces that I had made while she was talking to me. But to prove to her that she was mistaken, I drew my handkerchief from my pocket and blew my nose, although I had not the slightest desire to do so.

My partner pouted very pleasingly, but she said to me, —

"I hope, monsieur, that you will bear me no grudge for joking you thus."

"Very far from that, madame, it proves to me, in fact, that you read faces very well."

"Oh, it's very sarcastic of you to say that."

"No, madame, for you guessed that I was very much preoccupied, and you were not mistaken, but the cause is graver than you think."

"Really! and will you tell me what it is? at least, if it is allowable for me to ask you that."

"Oh, I have a great desire to tell you, but I dare not."

"Why not?"

"Because I fear you would blame me, and I should be so sorry to incur your displeasure."

"You must hurry, the quadrille is about to end."

"It isn't easy to tell. Do you waltz, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you accept me for the first waltz?"

"I am engaged for it."

"Oh, how unlucky, if you only knew, madame, in what a position that puts me."

"You would have told me your secret while waltzing?"

"Certainly."

"I know you will say that women are very curious, but — well, I accept. I was engaged by a short young man whom I do not know, I shall tell him that I was mistaken, and that the dance belongs to someone else."

"Oh, how kind you are, madame."

The quadrille ended. I led my partner to the place whence I had taken her. It was now a question of keeping a good countenance in the midst of all these people. I had carefully looked around me and I did not see one face that I knew. The company seemed rather choice. It was not one

of those weddings where they shout and make a good deal of noise to persuade themselves that they are cheerful. The men walked quietly about, or talked to the ladies, without those shouts of laughter or those tumultuous movements which sometimes give to a large gathering the aspect of an agitated sea. Devil take it! I saw someone had noticed me. This was a fat young man who had already looked rather hard at me twice as he passed by. I did not feel easy. My assurance, the result of my dinner and the different wines I had drunk, had left me; my conversation with my partner had awakened in my mind the most ardent desire to form a more intimate acquaintance with that lady, and had immediately dissipated the high spirits which had urged me to commit this folly. I was reflecting now, and that must make me look extremely awkward.

A gentleman had stopped near me who took from his pocket a snuff-box. He had one of those faces which bear more resemblance to a turkey than to an eagle, a head that might perhaps be venerable but for the immense nose which invaded the greater part of his face. If I could talk with this personage it would place me on a rather better footing.

I advanced towards this gentleman and, although I never took snuff, I extended my fingers towards his snuff-box as I said, —

“Will you kindly allow me?”

The gentleman, who was about to close his box, hastily opened it again, saying to me very impressively, —

“Taste that and tell me what you think of it.”

I saw that the gentleman attached a great deal of importance to the quality of his snuff, in fact, when one has a nose of such dimensions it is quite natural that one should think a good deal of his snuff. I took an enormous pinch and resignedly snuffed it. The snuff went into my nose, my throat and my eyes at the same time. I was strangling, but I tried to hide my awkwardness and obliged myself to appear highly pleased. The gentleman shook his head wisely and resumed, —

“Well, what do you think of it?”

“Delicious, excellent, I’ve never taken any so good.”

“Hang it, I can well believe it, do you recognize it?”

“Frankly, no, I do not recognize it. However, if I think a bit, perhaps — wait a bit — ”

I did what I could to prolong the conversation, for I was quite decided not to let this gentleman go before the orchestra had played the first measure of the waltz. Unhappily I am not very well acquainted with snuffs.

“You will try to remember in vain,” resumed the man with the snuff-box, “it is a mixture that I made myself; there’s some robbilard in it, some Belgian mixture and some caporal.”

“Ah, I should have said that too, there’s some caporal in it, I recognized that.”

“Oh, there’s very little of it, then, when the mixture is perfect, I add two or three drops of honey water, not more.”

“Ah, that’s what it is. I was saying to myself that I thought I recognized the taste.”

“It’s hardly felt; but it mitigates the strength of the robbilard, which sometimes does harm.”

“Confound it, I well believe you, the robbilard is likely to — above all before dinner — I have known persons who — then it all depends upon habit.”

I thought myself so stupid at this moment that I almost wanted to laugh in my own face. Fortunately I had to do with a gentleman who seemed to me to be as stupid as I was myself. He closed his snuff-box, saying to me, —

“Monsieur, this is the result of long research, although I have never studied chemistry.”

“You surprise me, I should have thought you a chemist merely from your snuff.”

“A great many people have said the same thing to me, but then I must tell you that I have taken snuff since I was thirteen.”

“You ought to know all about it.”

“I was ordered to use it for a malady of the eyes, and snuff alone cured it. I wanted to make Anna take it for an earache when she was seven years old, but it was impossible to do so. You

couldn't imagine, monsieur, all the inventions of that little thing that she might not have to take snuff. In the first place she hid my snuff-box, more than once she even threw it out of the window; then she put into it all sorts of disagreeable things, in fact, she spoiled my snuff and wanted to disgust me with it. Oh, what a child! Who would believe that now, eh?"

I did not answer, for the name of Anna, pronounced by this gentleman, reminded me that my partner had called the bride by that name. Could I be addressing some near relative of the newly married couple? This idea troubled me. I tried to lead the conversation to snuff, and I said, —

"If I dared, I would ask you for another pinch, it is so good, besides now that I know of what it is composed I shall enjoy it better."

My gentleman gravely took his snuff-box from his pocket, and was about to open it, when a young girl, between fourteen and fifteen, and very ugly, came running towards him, exclaiming, —

"Uncle Guillardin, you haven't forgotten that you're to dance with me first, because I want to dance and I've missed three dances now."

"Yes, yes, don't be uneasy, Joliette, I'll dance with you, that is settled."

"But the first one?"

"Yes, the first."

"Well, my cousin Archibald invited me twice, and then he did not come to get me."

"That was very unkind of him."

"I told him that I should come and complain to you, and he answered me, 'Go and dance a polka, and leave me alone,' and that was worse, because he knows that I don't dance the polka."

M. Guillardin, for now I knew the name of my new acquaintance, opened his snuff-box, which he offered me, and without taking any further notice of the young girl, who remained there, he said, —

"One day, monsieur, when I had been insisting longer than usual that Anna should take a few pinches, just as I was offering her my snuff-box she thought of breathing into it with all her might. You can imagine the effect; the snuff flew in my eyes, she had taken the precaution to close her own; my eyes pained me horribly, and for two days I could not see out of them, but after that I ceased to offer her snuff. Take a pinch."

With a devotion worthy of a better cause I took the second pinch. I don't know how I snuffed it this time, but I do know that my eyes smarted and that I felt like crying. Mademoiselle Joliette, the ill-named young girl, who had remained beside us, burst out laughing, as she said, —

"It seems to me that monsieur is like you, uncle, when cousin Anna had breathed in the snuff-box."

"What, you are still there, Joliette, go back to my daughter, you know very well that you are her maid of honor. Go now, your place is by the bride."

But Mademoiselle Joliette began to smile in a singular fashion, which made her eyebrows, already too high, go up still higher and gave her face the effect of a mask. The young girl kept looking at me, she seemed to have something to say but dared not explain herself. My presence seemed to restrain her. For my part, quite certain now that this gentleman with the immense nose was the bride's father, I was very sorry that I had addressed myself to him, and I kept looking towards the orchestra in the hope of seeing the musicians take their instruments.

M. Guillardin himself began to put snuff into his nostrils, which operation took him some time, when suddenly Mademoiselle Joliette made a slight movement of the head, and exclaimed, —

“ Well, so much the worse ; wait, uncle, I'll tell you why I am staying here. Well, just now my cousin Archibald, who was staring at this gentleman, said to me, — ‘ Joliette, go and ask my father who that gentleman is to whom he is giving snuff and to whom he is talking at this moment. I don't know the man, and it seems to me that he hasn't been long in the ballroom. I want to know who he is, because sometimes there are practical jokers who introduce themselves at weddings where they are not invited that they may stuff themselves with cakes and ices, but I don't intend that anyone shall play those tricks here.’ That is what my cousin charged me to ask you.”

Judge of my position, of the expression of my face, while that horrible little Joliette was saying all that. I am certain that I changed color more than once. However, I did the best I could, I forced myself to laugh and to look as if I thought the question a very good joke. When he saw me laugh, the respected gentleman with the large nose thought fit to do the same as I did, murmuring,—

“Ha, ha! that’s very good. I quite recognize my son Archibald there, ho, ho! he is such a heedless fellow, ha, ha, ha! Somebody who has introduced himself into our company without belonging to it; but he’ll beat him unmercifully. He’ll begin by jumping on him like a bulldog. Ha, ha! it’s very amusing. My dear, you must go and tell him that this gentleman is — that the gentleman is called — that I am with —”

Monsieur Guillardin dwelt on his words as he looked at me. He was beginning to understand, too, that he did not know me, and awaited my answer, opening his nostrils wider than his eyes. I can’t say what I experienced, I felt the drops of perspiration standing on my forehead, my mouth was dry, it was not fat Archibald’s anger that frightened me, but it was being treated like a man who is under suspicion, like an impertinent fellow who came there to get ices and punch, that idea upset me, and I now knew how unconventional was my conduct. I should have liked to disappear through a trap-door like the demons of the stage, and would

have thought myself well off had I got away with some broken bones.

At this moment the orchestra gave the signal for the waltz. Oh, thrice blessed music, never had it seemed to me so sweet, so melodious, so enticing. I bowed to the bride's father and said to him, —

"Pardon me, but I've invited a lady for this dance," and I escaped and ran towards the pretty brunette, who was my last hope, my anchor of salvation. Probably the expression of my face allowed her to see something of the torture, the anguish I experienced, for the lady rose quickly and took my arm. I led her off and we waltzed, but as we turned she herself opened the conversation.

"What is the matter with you, monsieur, you seem less cheerful than you did just now, and what about that secret you were going to tell me?"

"I'll tell you everything, madame, and shall only be too happy if you will deign to be indulgent to me and understand that this was only heedlessness, blamable, of course, but not deserving — good heavens, I don't know what I am saying."

"Well, why don't you speak, explain yourself?"

"That is true; there, I'm stepping on your foot now."

"That didn't hurt me."

"Madame, in the first place I must tell you that my name is Charles Rochebrune, that I was born in Paris of honorable parents. It will be easy for me to prove what I say."

"Why, good heavens, do you take me for a magistrate, why should you tell me all that?"

"That you may know that I am not a man without means. I have a fortune, I still have eight thousand francs income."

"Do you want to marry me, monsieur? I must warn you that I am married."

"No, madame, no, it is not to ask your hand that I told you all that, but it was that you might learn that I am not a man of—a vagabond, in short."

"Oh, monsieur, I assure you you don't look at all like that."

"Yes, but appearances are so deceitful sometimes. By Jove! I've lost the measure now."

"That doesn't matter, why don't you finish?"

"Well, you must know, madame, that I dined today at this restaurant with a good many other people, all of them men. The dinner was given by Dupréval, who is a lawyer and going to be married. We celebrated his adieu to his bachelor life and his approaching wedding, by which you may understand, madame, that champagne was not spared. The dinner was prolonged to a late hour. We heard the music of this ball and of the wedding near by, for there is another wedding near by."

"I know it, monsieur, what then?"

"We were about to start, myself and another young man who had remained after the others, when the sound of instruments, the sound of a

charming quadrille which they were playing, gave birth to a most foolish idea."

"Ah, I think I can guess it."

"A little animated by the champagne, seduced by the melodies of the orchestra — well, madame, Balloquet said to me, Balloquet is the name of my friend, 'We must go to the weddings although we haven't been invited there. You go to one and I'll go to the other. If they question us, we'll say that we made a mistake in the wedding.' I allowed myself to be led by Balloquet's example, he's at the other ball and I — am here."

Instead of getting angry as I had feared, my partner burst into a fit of laughter which the sound of the waltz hardly covered. I let her laugh for some moments, and then I resumed, —

"You forgive me, then, madame."

"Oh, altogether, monsieur. What you have done does not seem to me very criminal, it's rather audacious perhaps, but it is so funny."

"But, madame, now I need someone to act as my patron, for the bride's brother, M. Archibald, has noticed me, and just now as I was talking to a man with an immense nose, whom I did not know and who proved to be the bride's father —"

"With M. Guillardin?"

"Precisely. Well, a young person sent by that fat fellow, M. Archibald, came and asked him who I was. It seems that M. Archibald is not always amiable and that he would take such a joke very

ill. As for myself, madame, I quite feel that I was wrong; that I have done a very stupid thing; but if this M. Archibald should tell me so in terms that are not used by one gentleman to another, I swear to you that I am not of a disposition to stand it."

My pretty brunette no longer laughed, she murmured, —

"In fact, Anna's brother is a man who could hardly understand a joke. He's a fool, and being such is extremely susceptible. He gets angry and quarrels over a word. It seems that he's very strong, and that gives him a great deal of assurance."

"That is all the same to me. I don't care how strong the gentleman is, I don't fight like ragpickers, either with feet or fists."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?"

"If you would only, madame, have the kindness to say that you are acquainted with me, that you invited me to come here; to present me, in fact."

"I should desire nothing better if I were alone here, but my husband came with me. My husband, who knows everybody and sees everything. It's worse than solitaire. Oh, he would ask me immediately how I came to know you."

"See, madame, how they are looking at me already. Why, when we passed by M. Archibald, he pointed me out to several gentlemen who stood about him. No doubt he said to them, 'Do you know that man?' and they all answered, 'No.'"

"Oh, my God! monsieur, you make me shiver."

"I must look out for myself when this waltz ends, and I think it is about to end now."

"But I don't want them to send you away from here, you waltz so well, really it would be a pity."

"You're too kind, madame; however, if someone does not take me under her protection it will turn out very ill for me."

"Good heavens, if Frédérique were here. She'd get you out of your embarrassing position at once."

"What, a lady called Frédéric?"

"Yes, monsieur, Frédé-rique."

"Oh, I understand, the feminine of Frédéric. And this lady—?"

"She should have come to Anna's wedding, she promised me she would, and she has not come."

"They are hurrying the time. Just a few turns, and I shall be shamefully expelled from here. What I regret above all things, madame, is that you, who have been so indulgent to me, you whom no one can see for a moment without ardently desiring to do so again—"

"Oh, monsieur."

"All the same, if M. Archibald is disagreeable, if he will not content himself with the excuses I shall offer, I shall make him see that he hasn't to do with a coward."

"Oh, don't say that, you make me tremble. If I could see my husband—I—"

"My pretty partner did not finish. The music

stopped, the waltz was done, but almost immediately my partner uttered an exclamation of joy and led me towards the entrance door of the ballroom, whispering, —

“Come, come, you are saved, here is Frédérique.”

CHAPTER V

MADAME FRÉDÉRIQUE. THE WEDDING AT THE BACK

NEED I say that I allowed my pretty partner to lead me. We threaded our way through the crowd, treading on a few feet that we found in our way. My partner held me by the hand, and I squeezed that protecting hand in such a manner that it could not escape me.

We arrived at the door of the ballroom just as the lady who had come alone was about to enter. My conductress darted towards this lady and led her into the room which preceded the ballroom and, still without dropping my hand, even led her into an embrasure at some distance from the people who were walking about, and said to her, taking her by the arm, —

“Frédérique, you have just come in time to render a great service to this gentleman, and to me, for I am interested in him.”

“What must I do? Speak, my dear Armantine, I am quite ready.”

“Listen, it is you who are acquainted with monsieur, you who presented him, you, in fact, who asked him to come to this wedding, where he ought

to have asked for you ; but as you were not here when the gentleman arrived he did not know what to do. Now that you are here, you are going to introduce him, you understand?"

"Perfectly, it's the simplest thing in the world. Monsieur, you must offer me your arm, if you please, for if I am to introduce you, you must be my escort for some moments at least."

"With great pleasure, madame."

"How fortunate it is that I came without an escort and that my husband has a cold in his chest. They are quite right to say one stroke of good luck never comes without another."

"You will deign to oblige me, then, madame?"

"Oh, that is understood. I'm delighted to do something agreeable for Armantine. Your name, if you please, monsieur, for in order to present you it is necessary that I should know your name."

"Charles Rochebrune."

"Very good indeed, a lawyer, of course, all the young men are lawyers."

"I don't practise, but I studied for that profession."

"That is quite sufficient, now let us go into the ballroom."

The lady had put her hand on my arm, and was leaning on it as though we were old acquaintances. I now felt quite reassured. I walked with my head high and a serene face, and was not afraid to look around me. My partner left us just as we were

making our entrance into the ballroom, and the lady who was leaning on my arm said in a low tone,—

“Do you know my name?”

“I only know the one by which she called you just now.”

“I am Madame Dauberny; I have been married for eight years; I am twenty-seven, my husband is forty-four. He is wealthy, and has no occupation. He does not like society or balls, but I go without him. I was born at Bordeaux, and my parents were of the same country. I hope you are sufficiently instructed in case anyone should talk about me to you.”

“Yes, madame; thank you a thousand times.”

What I admired was the easy manner in which the lady said all this to me as we passed through the crowd. In seeing us talk, I am sure that no one would have suspected that she saw me this evening for the first time. But M. Guillardin and the bride were coming to meet my conductress; I also saw fat Archibald, who was walking behind his sister and who, as he bowed to Madame Dauberny, still looked curiously at me.

“How late you have come,” cried the bride, taking the hand of my protectress.

“We were in despair,” said the respected gentleman of the big nose, “it is half-past twelve and we were saying, ‘Madame Dauberny hasn’t come. However, she promised us.’”

“And, as you see, I am here, I never break my

promises. What I say makes M. Archibald laugh, yet it is quite true, monsieur."

"Madame, I was only laughing for pleasure—at seeing you."

"You're too gallant, monsieur, but I am very culpable in coming so late, because I placed this young man in a very embarrassing position, for I told him that I would be here at eleven o'clock and that he had only to come to me and I would present him. It is this gentleman here who has been looking for me in your ballroom for upwards of an hour, according to what he tells me, and he, not seeing me, did not know to whom to address himself. Allow me to present to you, M. Charles Rochebrune, a distinguished lawyer and an indefatigable dancer. I thought that you would be willing to welcome an old friend of my childhood."

Here I made a low bow to the bride, to her father and to Archibald, who this time deigned also to smile on me, and M. Guillardin exclaimed,—

"All your friends are welcome, fair lady, I hope that you will never have a doubt of that; but I've already had the pleasure of making monsieur's acquaintance and he appreciates my snuff, only I confess that I did not know with whom I was talking and I was about to ask him when he left me to go and waltz. For the rest, if we had known that he came under your patronage that would have sufficed to accord him a warm welcome."

"You're too kind, M. Guillardin, but M. Roche-

brune preferred to wait till I arrived ; did you not, monsieur ? ”

I answered, “ Yes, madame,” with an expression which made Madame Dauberny smile, and it seemed to me that this brought a pout to M. Archibald’s countenance.

“ But where is M. Dablémar ? I don’t see him.”

Madame Dauberny had hardly said the word when a little gentleman, thin and peaky looking, but got up in very good style, came running towards us, exclaiming, —

“ Ah, here is the much desired lady whom we quite despaired of seeing. I must dance with you, I engage you for the next dance, if you are quite willing, that is, to accord me the honor.”

“ We shall see later on. I don’t like to dance the very first thing. Give me time to know where I am.”

“ My poor Anna has been obliged to rest a little. Her brother stepped on her foot. He did well, it was for her good, she was dancing too much.”

This gentleman, whom I had only just guessed to be the bridegroom, stopped when he saw me, probably for the first time. My patroness, who had for a moment let go of my arm, immediately took my hand, saying to the bridegroom, —

“ Monsieur Charles Rochebrune, one of my good friends, whom I take the liberty of presenting to you.”

Monsieur Dablémar greeted me in the usual

manner. I had now been duly presented to the married couple and their relatives. I belonged to the wedding party, and I could circulate about the rooms without fear. Now that I dreaded nothing more for myself, my first pleasure was to observe at my ease the woman who had so bravely served as my shield — this woman who, without knowing me, without having seen me, had kindly taken my arm and presented me in a numerous gathering as a person with whom she was familiarly acquainted. I knew very well that she had done this at the solicitation of one of her friends, to whom she probably thought she was rendering a great service. Nevertheless, there was something courageous in the action which pleased and delighted me. Was it devotion to friendship? was it heedlessness of disposition? was it peculiarity, originality? I did not yet know, but I owed deep gratitude to the lady, for she had pulled me out of a rather bad hole.

During the first moments of my presentation I was too flurried, too preoccupied, to think of examining the person who was presenting me. All that I could say was that at the first glance this lady had seemed to have something original about her which was very becoming; but now that nothing restrained me, and that Madame Dauberny was talking with the bride, I could allow myself to examine her. She whom my pretty partner had called *Frédérique* was rather above middle height, thin

rather than fat, but very well built, and had in her bearing, her walk, something careless, even cavalier, which suited her to distraction ; her foot, without being very small, was well arched. She carried her head rather high, and often supported one of her hands upon her hip, man fashion.

Madame Dauberny was not precisely a pretty woman, one might even have passed her by without noticing her, but the longer and more minutely one looked at her, the further she gained by this examination, because there was a good deal of expression in her countenance, which was very mobile. She was a brunette in the full acceptation of the term ; her hair was so black that it approached blue. This is not a joke, extremely black and shining hair sometimes has a blue reflection, but one does not often see these beautiful tresses. This lady had beautiful deep blue eyes, fine eyebrows, and long-fringed eyelashes. She fixed them unhesitatingly on the person to whom she was speaking, and they seemed to defy you to make them droop, no matter who you might be. They indicated a woman of character, an energetic woman, shall I say a passionate woman ? I think I should be wrong there. Strong characters know how to control their passions instead of allowing themselves to be governed by them. Let me finish my portrait. Her rather large nose was straight, the nostrils rather prominent, her mouth was large, lips rather thin, but the teeth very white and even. Her mouth

had a jesting, almost a satirical expression, it looked also as though it could express disdain and anger.

Madame Dauberny was pale, and had we been in the light I should have been surprised had she had a white skin; an oval chin, a high forehead, so much for the features; but all that only describes to you very imperfectly the whole charm of the original head. One had to see the lady to understand that, and I think see her more than once, for during the little while I had been looking at her, her face had changed three or four times.

What pleased me a good deal in the lady was her speech, in which there was a slight accent of the South, which I think ravishing in a woman. Madame Dauberny had a ringing voice like nearly all persons born on the borders of the Garonne. It was not soft, but the accent deprived it of all that might have been hard; and then this voice recalled to me a charming Bordelaise, whom I had loved a great deal, and whom I had known so short a time. To sum up, I felt very much flattered at passing for one of Madame Dauberny's friends; but that did not make me forget my amiable partner, to whom I also owed gratitude. I should have liked very much to have had some details in regard to that pretty brunette; and resolved, if I dared, to ask them of her friend Frédérique.

Just then the latter came towards me and said, quite low, as she took my arm,—

“Will you still be my squire?”

"Ah, madame, I am only too happy that you are kind enough to accept me as such."

"Let us take several turns in the hall. I'll finish putting you at your ease and give you some information as to the company; later on you will be free to return to Armantine."

"Armantine, ah, that is the lady who spoke to you about me."

"Of course, I thought that you knew her."

"Why, not at all, I saw her here for the first time, only I've danced a quadrille and waltzed with her."

"Well, that is just a little bit queer; and what about that lively interest she bears you?"

"That was because I had confided to her a piece of heedless folly I had just committed and which I am going to tell you also if you will permit me."

"Not only will I permit it, but I wish it, for, in fact, I really must know the friend of my childhood a little."

I related to Madame Dauberny the story I had already told her friend. She listened attentively to me. She did not show the least emotion, her impassibility frightened me. However, when I had ceased speaking she shook her head and smiled slightly as she murmured, —

"That was a bit risky; then your friend is in the ball beside this one."

"Yes, madame."

"And what is your friend's name?"

“Balloquet.”

“What does he do?”

“He’s a doctor.”

“All this is no great crime, provided that you really are an honorable man, as you say.”

“Ah, madame, this suspicion!”

“It seems to me it is quite permissible, for, in fact, you may be a very worthless fellow, one of those young men who cannot be received in good society, and you may have said to yourself, ‘I am going to amuse myself at the expense of all those people.’ What would there be astonishing in that! Oh, how sulky you look! Take care, or they’ll think that I am quarrelling with you, and when a woman quarrels with a man it’s because she has rights over him. So you see that your long face will compromise me.”

I was horribly vexed. The lady certainly had a right to be suspicious concerning me, but the tone of raillery which she had assumed, her air of not being quite persuaded, in fact, the way in which she said it, all increased my vexation and I no longer knew what to answer. How could I prove that I was speaking the truth?

At this moment a gentleman of forty, elegantly got up, rather good-looking, but with a vague and undecided expression, stopped in front of us to exchange compliments with the incredulous Frédérique. I looked at this gentleman, whose face was not unknown to me; he did the same and bowed

to me very amiably. I can't say how much pleasure I experienced when he bowed, although I did not quite know who had thus addressed me.

"Oh, you know M. Rochebrune?" said Madame Dauberny to the person who had stopped in front of us.

"Yes, madame, I have several times met monsieur in society, notably at General Traunitz's, also at Madame de Saint-Albert's gatherings."

"In fact," said I, in my turn, "I also remember having had the pleasure of meeting monsieur at those soirees."

"For the matter of that," resumed Madame Dauberny, "I should have been greatly astonished had M. Sordeville not known you, he who knows all Paris and who knows all that is doing, all that goes on here."

"Oh, madame, you allow me a great deal more knowledge than I possess," answered the gentleman, smiling in what he meant to be a good-humored way, which did not at all suit his face. "You came very late, madame. Armantine was so sorry not to see you, which, however, did not prevent her from dancing, but M. Rochebrune knows something about that, for I saw him waltzing with my wife, and doing it very well, I assure you."

"What, monsieur, was it your wife with whom I had the pleasure of dancing?"

"Why, what singular personages you both are!" cried Madame Dauberny, looking at the gentleman

and me mockingly. "What, you are acquainted with each other and monsieur does not know that it was Madame Sordeville with whom he waltzed?"

"What is there surprising in that, madame? I met M. Rochebrune at parties to which my wife had not accompanied me. Those things may happen every day. That one is married is no reason why one should not go out sometimes without his better-half, and it seems to me that you are furnishing a proof of that yourself this evening."

Monsieur Sordeville said these words with a certain affectation. Now that I knew that this gentleman was my pretty partner's husband, I looked at him more attentively. He was very good-looking, his features were regular and his face was rather distinguished, but I did not like that face. However, Madame Dauberny was not cut short by the little dart that M. Sordeville had launched at her, though I did not hear her answer because my charming partner was approaching; she came and took her husband's arm just as her friend was speaking to him.

"My dear Armantine," said my introductress, "you don't know that your husband is acquainted with M. Rochebrune, whom I ventured to bring to this wedding. He's a terrible man is your husband, if I had wanted to introduce someone here under a fictitious name he would have discovered the whole intrigue."

The pretty brunette smiled and blushed a little;

then she put her arm in that of her friend and led her away, not, however, before I had whispered to Madame Dauberny, —

“Well, are you now persuaded that I was telling you the truth?”

She pressed my hand as a man would have done. “I never thought that you were doing anything else.”

Monsieur Sordeville remained beside me, he seemed to wish to enter into conversation, and I desired nothing better than to make more ample acquaintance with the husband of a lady who pleased me so greatly; for if the gentleman had a countenance which was rather unpleasing, one had the liberty of thinking of his wife as one talked to him.

“Madame Dauberny is an extremely amiable person,” said M. Sordeville, breaking the first ice.

“Yes, she is very amiable, she seems to have a good deal of wit.”

“Have you only just found that out?”

I bit my lips, I had made a blunder. I hastily resumed in a careless tone, —

“I meant to say, on the contrary, that she had a great deal more wit than she allows to appear.”

“Oh, you think so? Why, it seems to me that she does not hide what wit she has.”

I shall have some trouble getting out of that, thought I. When anyone is stuck in a bad road it's the devil and all to get out of it on to a good one; this M. Sordeville was very embarrassing.

The bride's brother was quite near us at this moment. He stopped, saying to M. Sordeville, —

“Of whom are you speaking?”

“Of Madame Dauberny.”

“Of Madame Dauberny? oh, she's a jolly good sort she is.”

Monsieur Sordeville made a slight movement of the head, as he answered, —

“Hum, that word is a little risky, isn't it?”

“Why so? I understand by that a decided disposition, which never yields, a woman who does her own will and who holds herself above a heap of prejudices, and who cares not for what anybody says. As for that, Madame Frédérique — you know she prefers to be called that — detests her husband's name; Madame Frédérique, I say, is not afraid to confess that she does what she pleases and that she will do what she pleases. When a woman says that, it seems to me one may well call her a jolly good sort.”

Monsieur Sordeville contented himself with smiling and murmuring, —

“People say so many things that they don't do. Sometimes they do so to give themselves a reputation for originality.”

“As for that,” resumed fat Archibald, addressing me, “you, monsieur, who are a friend of Madame Frédérique's infancy, do you not share the opinion that I have just expressed in regard to her?”

I then perceived that M. Sordeville was glancing furtively at me. I answered, weighing my words carefully, —

“Monsieur, since I have had the pleasure of knowing Madame Dauberny, I’ve always thought her possessed of excellent qualities. She has a very fine mind, she’s a little sarcastic perhaps, but as to her faults, I don’t know them. As for that, witty people are becoming so rare that they may well pass for original.”

The gentlemen were silent. M. Sordeville nodded his head, M. Archibald compressed his mouth, the orchestra played the prelude to a quadrille. I wanted to do something handsome to put myself on good terms with the bride’s family. I went and invited Mademoiselle Joliette to dance.

The ugly little girl accepted with an air of delight. While we were dancing I perceived Madame Dauberny, who looked at me smiling, as if to say, “What you are doing now is well thought of.”

As for me, I hoped later on to recompense myself by inviting my charming Armantine for another quadrille.

But just as we were dancing the last figure of the contra-dance, a great noise was heard which seemed to come from outside. They were shouting and disputing in the corridor. I thought I recognized Balloquet’s voice. He had not been so fortunate as I, or rather he must have committed some imprudence. I hurried towards the direction of the

shouting. Just as I arrived in the vestibule which separated the two balls the dispute seemed to grow animated. Among the men's voices I could perfectly distinguish that of Balloquet, who shouted, —

“Once more, messieurs, it's an error, a simple error. What the devil, isn't anyone liable to make a mistake? I took one wedding for the other; as a general thing weddings resemble each other greatly, above all when they are dancing — it's a mere trifle —”

The restaurant waiters tried to re-establish peace by attesting that Balloquet had dined upstairs with very honorable persons. I managed to pierce the crowd. I saw some very grotesque faces which would have figured well in the pages of the “*Charivari*.” The greater part of these gentlemen had kept, though in full dress, that common air which the finest coat cannot hide. They were all very much excited against poor Balloquet, who was as red as a cherry and carried on in the midst of them like one possessed. A fat man of fifty, who looked as if his eyes were made of glass, they were so fixed and shiny, held Balloquet by the arm, repeating at every turn, —

“It can't be passed off like that, hang it, whoever you are or whoever you are not, I want proofs, proofs, I want proofs.”

A tall, fair young man with an insipid, stupid face, whose sleek, shiny hair came down to his eyebrows, seemed to threaten Balloquet, and said, —

“Besides, what did you do to my wife? come, did you do it, yes or no? Pétronille is not capable of imposing upon me, she told me that you pinched her; that’s nice that is, to pinch the bride, and without belonging to the wedding party. If, at least, you had been invited to the wedding — still, that wouldn’t be any reason.”

“Monsieur, I was merely dancing, if I did anything out of the way it was because I thought that was in the figure.”

“Oh, that’s a good one, you thought pinching Pétronille was in the figure, that isn’t reasonable.”

“But, monsieur, you don’t understand.”

The fat man with glassy eyes shouted again, —

“It can’t be passed over like that, hang it, proofs, proofs, proofs.”

At this moment, to increase the tumult, a fat mamma of at least sixty, having a flat nose smeared with snuff and her face framed by a blond wig, of which the ringlets, artistically grouped in stages, made her look as if she had whiskers, and loaded with flowers, ribbons, lace and false jewelry, appeared in the midst of these gentlemen, crying in a squeaking voice, —

“I don’t want Pamphile to fight, I forbid him to fight! What is the matter here? Pamphile, you shall not fight. I would rather fight in my son’s place. Oh, my son, am I your mother or not? Monsieur is a vulgar fellow, a blackguard, a rascal, put him out of the door, go and get the guard.”

"No, madame, I am not a blackguard," said Balloquet, darting furious glances at the old dame, who was decked out like a circus horse, "and I will prove it."

"Madame Girie, why don't you go back into the ballroom, your place is not here; we have no need of women to settle this affair."

"I tell you I don't want my son to fight? Pamphile, come, come in with me. Don't get mixed up in all this."

"Come, mamma, do leave me alone, I beg of you. Go back to the ladies."

"No, no, I don't want you to fight because monsieur has pinched your wife. Good heavens, a pretty piece of business. In the first place, Pétronille had no need to tell you that. Good heavens, if the late M. Girie had fought every time anyone had pinched me—but I never told him, I was careful to keep from complaining. I loved my husband too much for that and he loved his beautiful blonde. You must take monsieur to the guard-house, to the guard-house, the guard-house," and Madame Girie persisted in shouting, "to the guard-house," and thrust out her arm, showering blows upon everybody, thus increasing the disorder while wishing to re-establish peace.

It was just then that I managed to get up to Balloquet and deliver him from the gentleman with the glassy eyes, exclaiming, —

"What is the matter here, messieurs? What has

happened to you, my dear Balloquet, from whence come all these people who are swarming after you?"

Balloquet uttered an exclamation of joy when he perceived me, and looking proudly at all his adversaries said, —

"You see very well, messieurs, that I told you the truth, here is my friend who was at the other wedding and who has come to get me. Is it not true, Rochebrune, that you came to get me, and that I am really Arthur Balloquet, a medical practitioner, and that I am not one of those people who have to be put out."

"Proofs, proofs, proofs."

"I don't want my son to fight, Pamphile, listen to your mother."

"You pinched Pétronille, and I can't get over that."

"Well, since I was mistaken —"

"To the guard-house!"

"Why, in the name of God, Madame Girie, do us the favor of holding your tongue." A little man whom they had not yet perceived, because he had been hidden by everybody, managed at this point to pass his blond and crisply curled head under Madame Girie's earrings, then making grimaces like a sort of Punch, this person, who greatly resembled a marionette, said, —

"Permit me, permit me, I must try to explain. Monsieur says that he made a mistake in coming to my cousin Pamphile Girie's wedding, but a per-

son can't be mistaken for a whole hour, and monsieur was with us for more than an hour. I noticed monsieur; he was drinking punch at every turn and making more noise than everybody, for I said to myself, 'He's the life of the party, he really is the life and soul of the party,' but monsieur must have easily perceived that he did not know us, that the married couple were not those who had invited him. Eh, it seems to me that I'm right, that I am sequential in my reasoning."

The little marionette was not so stupid as one would have thought. Balloquet did not know how to answer his remarks. I hastened to speak, —

"Messieurs, my friend, Arthur Balloquet, has not deceived you. He is a very estimable doctor and incapable of intentionally offending you. He was mistaken as to the room, that is all. You must not see more harm in that than there really is."

"And I enjoyed myself so well where I was," said Balloquet, "that I could not make up my mind to tear myself away."

This compliment softened the ferocity of the gentleman with the big eyes. However, he was about to demand proofs again, when, on turning his head, he perceived M. Guillardin, who had come to learn the cause of the tumult, accompanied by Madame Dauberny. The latter approached me and whispered, —

"It is probably your friend Balloquet who has caused this scene."

I glanced at her affirmatively ; but at the same moment an exclamation of surprise was heard, —

“ Why, it’s M. Guillardin, my landlord.”

“ It is I, M. Bocal, what are you doing here ?”

“ What am I doing ? Why, I am marrying my daughter Pétronille to Girie here. Come forward, Girie, come and say how do you do to my landlord, to whom I sent an invitation, I am sure.”

The tall, fair man came forward with the stupid look which never left him, and bowed gawkily to M. Guillardin. This incident produced a fortunate diversion ; no one took any more notice of Balloquet, although Madame Girie murmured again, —

“ Oh, if my son were to fight I should be ill, I know I should, but he won’t go on the ground without my following him. I am capable of anything when Pamphile is in question, when he’s not in at eleven o’clock, midnight, I sit down at the window and pass the night there. I stay there until he comes in ; when I hear a horse, I say, ‘ Here is my son.’ Sometimes I only have three dressing-sacques and two chemises on, it’s all the same to me. I don’t care a fig about taking cold.”

Nobody listened to Madame Girie, and M. Guillardin, after receiving the salutation of Pamphile and M. Bocal, said to the latter, —

“ By Jove ! my dear monsieur, there is a coincidence in what we are doing. I am here for the same purpose as yourself.”

“ I don’t quite catch what you mean.”

"I also have married my daughter today, and we are celebrating the wedding right beside you."

"Can it be possible that it's your wedding — I mean to say that you are marrying your daughter?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Madame Dauberny in her turn, "and I have been waiting for M. Balloquet to come and ask me to dance for a long time. I told him I would be at Mademoiselle Guillardin's wedding."

Balloquet looked in astonishment at this lady, whom he did not know, but who had called him by his name, but he hastened to answer, —

"Madame, I am yours to command, but you see I am having an explanation with these gentlemen and —"

"Oh, that's all done with, let there be no more question about that," cried big Bocal, shaking hands with Balloquet. "If I had only guessed that you belonged to my landlord's wedding party. Madame, messieurs, we shall be very much flattered if you will honor us with your presence, if you will deign to come to our ball. M. Guillardin, I beg of you, do me this honor, let me present Pétronille to you. Pamphile, call Pétronille. Madame, messieurs, come, please, and take a turn in our ballroom. Cousin Ravinet, make everybody stand aside that they may give way to my landlord."

Cousin Ravinet was the little man who spoke like Punch; he darted into the room where they were celebrating M. Girie's wedding, exclaiming, —

"Here is my cousin's landlord. I announce him, he's coming to our wedding; Bocal's bringing him to us. A little music, if you please, hi! over there, orchestra."

The musicians thought they were demanding music to dance with and set to work playing a polka, and M. Guillardin, led almost by force by his tenant, presently found himself at the wedding which was taking place in the back room. Madame Dauberny and I followed him. Balloquet did the same, being borne almost in triumph by the bridegroom, who said to him, —

"Why didn't you tell us at once that you were a friend, a friend of a friend, we should not have quarrelled. Now that we know that you belong to the wedding party of my father-in-law Bocal's landlord, it's all right. Shake hands, I want you to dance first of all with Pétronille."

"You're too amiable, M. Girie, and what about the mistake I committed in pinching your wife?"

"Come now, don't speak any more of that. That was only for a joke; something to laugh at. Why, if you like, you can stay with us, since you found it amusing. Now that we know each other, we can play jokes. Come, that's settled, you'll stay with us and at supper I'll take good care of you."

"What, you have a supper?"

"Hang it, I should think so. Did you ever see a good wedding without a supper? You'll be one of us, that's understood."

“By Jove! M. Pamphile, you are so amiable, your society is so cheerful, I have a great desire to leave the landlord’s wedding —”

We were walking behind these gentlemen, Madame Dauberny and I, and we perfectly heard the conversation. Madame Dauberny, who had taken my arm as if we were old acquaintances, said to me in a whisper, —

“It will be very fortunate if your friend Balloquet stays at this wedding, for I think he’s had a little too much wine, and if he comes to Anna’s ball he might say things which would compromise us and cause our little subterfuge to be discovered.”

“You are perfectly right, madame, but don’t be uneasy. Balloquet will stay here. They’re speaking to him of a supper, and he’s one of those persons who never refuse a meal even when they have already had four during the day.”

“He must have a good appetite. Good heavens, look there, I think they are going to make us caper now. M. Bocal wants to make his landlord dance a polka. He must be at the end of his lease and want to renew it.”

The honor had, in fact, gone to M. Bocal’s head and he marched in time to the music and presented, almost with a polkastep, his landlord to his daughter Pétronille, who was a fat, plump girl, with full-blown charms, very fresh and rosy looking, and possessing only what is called *la beauté du diable*? M. Guillardin pulled out his snuff-box and offered

a pinch to the young bride, who contented herself with murmuring, —

“Snuff, the idea, to make me sneeze while I’m dancing and I haven’t a pocket-handkerchief about me.”

“Do you dance the polka?” said Madame Frédérique to me.

“Yes, madame.”

“Well, let us try one then. I should be just as well pleased to make my entrée at this wedding in a polka. It will be still more droll. As for that, I can see faces now which give me a great desire to laugh. Come, monsieur, they say that you waltz well, let’s see if you can polka the same.”

We started off, I was enjoying the evening. After an excellent waltzer, I had found a lady who danced the polka delightfully. We went forward and backward. We turned in every manner. It seemed that our style was greatly admired at the Bocal wedding, for I heard them say as we passed, —

“Oh, how well those two are dancing.”

“Look at those two there, how nicely they dance the polka.”

“Who are those persons!”

“They are from the wedding beside us. The wedding of M. Bocal’s landlord, he invited them. They dance the polka in a very superior way. They must at least be stage dancers.”

“I wager they’re attached to the opera.”

Madame Dauberny heard. She laughed as she

danced, which did not prevent her passing the ballroom in review and saying to me at every moment, —

“Do you see that couple over there? For ten minutes they’ve been in the same place, they want to dance, but they can neither advance nor retire. Do you notice a big woman in pink in this corner to the left? She has a crown of foliage on her head, she’s placed like a caryatid, and looks as if she were going to cry, and those two dames or damsels who are polkaing together and throwing themselves into everybody, and that little dwarf skipping about with a big woman?”

“That’s cousin Ravinet.”

“Oh, there are some very good caricatures here, there are some rather pleasing young girls, but they dress like grisettes. It’s not improbable that — I am quite curious to know what this M. Bocal does.”

The polka had ended. It was stiflingly hot at the wedding in the back room.

“I’ve had enough of it,” said Madame Dauberny to me, “besides, I think M. Guillardin has gone back to his daughter. Take me into the other ballroom, then you can come back here, if that pleases you.”

“I beg you to believe, madame, that I also prefer the gathering to which you belong.”

“I do believe you; I should be sorry for you if it were otherwise. However, you must come

back to speak to your friend Balloquet. Balloquet, you must confess that is rather a queer name for a doctor. If I were ill I wouldn't allow myself to be attended by a doctor who called himself Balloquet."

"Do you think then, that there is anything in a name, madame?"

"A great deal, monsieur. Had you been called Balloquet, I could never have made up my mind to say that you were the friend of my infancy."

As we talked, we had gone back to the wedding of which I was now a guest, but as a quadrille was beginning just as we went into the ballroom, Madame Dauberny seated herself near the entrance, and I placed myself near her, happy to be able to continue my conversation with the amiable Frédérique, for I thought that lady very amiable, and if I had not been already in love with her friend Armantine—but it is so pleasant to be in love even when it leads to nothing, that it must be still more so if it should lead to something.

I was ignorant as to what would be the end of my love affair, but it is always permitted to hope.

"I am under a great deal of obligation, madame, for what you have done for me tonight."

"Good heavens, monsieur, you have already expressed your gratitude. I'd rather you say no more about it."

"You know, madame, that I have already met M. Sordeville several times in society, but that is

not enough for me. I should like to be entirely known to you, and if you will allow me to call upon you and pay my compliments — ”

Madame Dauberny for a moment looked at me in a singular fashion. I should very much have liked to divine what was passing in her mind, but she soon answered me in her deliberate way, —

“No, monsieur, I cannot allow you to call upon me ; besides, why should you want to come?”

“Why, to have the pleasure of seeing you, madame, because I should like to become better acquainted with you and because — ”

“No, it is useless. Now, monsieur, that I am perfectly convinced of your good faith in regard to all you have told me, what can you desire more?”

“Nothing in that direction, but when one has had the pleasure of being your cavalier for a whole evening, it is painful, madame, to think that one may perhaps never see you again.”

“Oh, never is a word which ought to be erased from the dictionary, ought it not, monsieur?”

“I am of your opinion, madame, for it is a very sad word.”

“And very false three parts of the time. For the matter of that, if you like you can be with me, be easy, you can see me again.”

“And where, madame?”

“At Armantine’s.”

“At Madame Sordeville’s? why, I don’t know her any better than I do you.”

"But her husband knows you. Talk again with him a little bit and I'll wager that he invites you to go and see him."

"Do you think so, madame?"

"Try it and you will see. Ah, here's that terrible Archibald coming towards us. Take care or you will make an enemy of him."

"And how shall I do that?"

"I'm sure he thinks that you are paying me attention. He's capable of thinking more than that even, and you know the gentleman has made me a declaration."

"Why, I presume that must be done very often."

"That is about true."

"Monsieur Archibald only follows the road that a great many other people are tempted to take."

"Why, monsieur, I am quite willing that anyone should make a declaration of love to a lady, when it has no further consequences. That is the most common thing in the world, and if only a woman be coquettish and pleasing, she can boldly wager on getting a declaration of love from all the men of her acquaintance. There's no great merit in that. Why, because a woman is less prudish than another, because she expresses her thoughts frankly, because she's not afraid to laugh at a cheerful word, in fact, because they find in her manners a carelessness, an originality, some character, some boldness even, why should they imagine that the conquest of such a woman must be easy? that in

fact, they have only to — You can guess all that I do not say ; well, monsieur, that is a great error, they must be either foolish or fatuous.”

Was it for me that she said all that? I don't know. However, I hadn't made her the slightest declaration, and if I had evinced the desire to see her again, to thank her again, it seems to me that was quite natural after the service she had rendered me. No, that was simply an opinion which she had given me *en passant*, but then, is she persuaded that I should like to pay court to her? She is in error. I was thinking only of my charming waltzer, of Madame Sordeville.

The quadrille was finished, I left my place, and returned for a moment to the wedding at the back. I wanted to make sure that Balloquet did not come to look for me, and also to see what they were doing at M. Bocal's ball. After what little I had seen in the other ballroom, I thought that some very comical things must be going on there.

CHAPTER VI

THE MARRIED COUPLE AND THEIR RELATIVES. A YOUNG LION. A CHARMING HUSBAND

PUNCH, hot wine and bishop were continually being passed round at Mademoiselle Bocal's wedding, and the ladies partook of this sort of refreshment quite as frequently as the men. From this you can understand that at the ball at the back the revelry was rather of a bacchanalian character. The greater number of the ladies were as red as beet-roots. Some of them were continually laughing, some of them, probably rendered tender by the hot wine, rolled their eyes so languishingly as to drive you into a corner. Others, saddened by their punch, heaved deep sighs and had moist eyes. As to the men, they were nearly all noisy, I might say drunk.

When I again entered this ballroom, I looked about for Balloquet, and saw him seated beside a brunette, who was crowned with hundred-leaved roses and whose cheeks quite effaced the color of her crown. The young doctor in embryo, for Balloquet might be ranked in that class, was so fully taken up with his charmer that he did not see me, although I stood right in front of him. I tapped him on the shoulder.

“Monsieur Balloquet, I should very much like to say a couple of words to you, if possible.”

“It isn’t possible just now, I am very much engaged. I am explaining to mademoiselle the correct manner of applying leeches,” and Balloquet glanced at me very significantly. I understood their conversation was very interesting, and was about to leave him, when I felt myself seized by the arm. It was the little punch of a man whom they called Ravinet, who was gripping on to me and shouting, for everybody was shouting instead of speaking, —

“Oh, you belong to the landlord’s wedding party, I recognize you. It was you who danced the polka so well. It was very nice of you to come back to us. You’re going to dance the polka again, ain’t you? If you want to please Aunt Chalumeau, you’ll invite her. The poor dear woman has never danced a polka in her life and she’s dying to do so. Her hairdresser told her that she had an aptitude for it.”

I did not at all care to try Aunt Chalumeau’s aptitude, and I answered cousin Ravinet, who persisted in hanging on my arm, —

“I assure you that I shall not dance the polka for some time, I feel very tired.”

“Ah, that’s a pity. Ain’t you an opera dancer?”

“I! Not at all.”

“You are a relative of my cousin’s landlord?”

“No, I am a friend.”

“And that lady who was skipping about with you, wasn’t she an opera dancer?”

"Nothing of the kind."

"We all thought you were. You jigged about so well."

"Monsieur Ravinet!"

"Oh, you know my name."

"I have that honor. Pray have the kindness to tell me to what profession M. Bocal belongs."

"What, aren't you acquainted with my cousin?"

"I know that he is the father of the bride and that he's M. Guillardin's tenant; but that is all."

"What! Don't you know Bocal the distiller's shop in the Rue Montmartre. He's one of the biggest distillers in Paris."

"Oh, he's a distiller, is he?"

"Why, everybody knows that."

"I must tell you that I very rarely have any business with distillers."

"The syrup of punch comes from his place and it's famous. Have you had any of it?"

"No, and I don't care about any."

"Oh, you must have some. You must see what it's like. Hi! come here quick, cousin Bocal, hi! here's a gentleman from your landlord's wedding who hasn't tasted your punch."

The fat man with the glassy eyes had stopped when he heard little Ravinet's voice. Then he came to me and sticking his fist under my other arm said to me, with a breath that burnt my face, for this gentleman had the unfortunate habit of sticking his face right into yours when he spoke, —

"Ah, monsieur, you're of my landlord's wedding party. Certainly you will not insult me by coming amongst us without taking anything. Hello, waiter!"

"You are too good, M. Bocal, but —"

"The punch is made with my own spirit. It's perfumed and will scent your breath."

"That is what I was saying to monsieur, cousin."

"Hello, waiter!"

"Hello, waiter! some punch, my cousin's calling you."

Cousin Ravinet had set himself to do his part, and these two gentlemen held me in such a way that I could not move. A waiter came with a tray. I understood that I should get into trouble if I refused, and that I might bring down upon myself the anger of Madame Girie, whom I perceived very busily whispering in a corner with other ladies.

I swallowed a glass of punch and hoped that they would restore me to liberty, but it was not so. M. Bocal led me to his daughter Pétronille, saying to me, —

"You are going to dance with the bride."

"It's a great honor of course, but, —"

"Oh! you must dance with her, my landlord did not wish to dance, but he's an old man. You, who are such a famous dancer, cannot refuse her."

I did not know how to evade the honors which were thrust upon me. M. Bocal had already said to his daughter, —

"Pétronille, you are going to dance with monsieur — my landlord's friend."

"But, papa, I am dancing with Freluchon."

"I don't care a fig for Freluchon, I tell you, Pétronille, you are to dance with monsieur, and you'll see how he dances. You'll have to look out for yourself."

"But poor Freluchon, whom I promised two hours ago, and who has gone on purpose to wash his hands, because he has lost his gloves, will be vexed."

"By Jove! M. Bocal," said I, "don't put anybody out, I can dance later on with the bride. I should not like to cause any trouble."

"On the contrary, it will give me a great deal of pleasure, monsieur. I don't care a hang whether Freluchon is vexed or not. Has anyone ever seen anything like it. The idea of putting one's self out for him. Oh, you must dance this one with the bride. There, the orchestra is beginning, get to your places quickly."

There was no way of escaping. Devil take it, what a hole I had got into! These kind of people are as stubborn as mules. Had I refused, they would have been angry. People of little education are always very susceptible with men of the world, for they feel their inferiority. They fear that people are making game of them, even when they have not the slightest idea of so doing.

I made up my mind and took my place with the

bride, who did not seem to be at all delighted at dancing with me and who probably regretted Freluchon.

“Who’s going to dance opposite to the bride?” cried M. Bocal, in a stentorian voice.

“We are, we are, here we are.”

We saw coming towards us a tall, withered, bald old man, who held a little girl of seven or eight by the hand. Certainly these persons would not afford me any distraction. I heard murmuring behind me and complaint. Then M. Bocal’s voice, which drowned everything else. It was probably poor Freluchon, who was angry at having washed his hands for nothing. However, the quadrille began. The bride went at it with all her heart. She was a fat girl, who had evidently said that she was going to enjoy herself on her wedding day, and who believed in keeping her word. If she did not tread on my feet I might consider myself fortunate. The tall old man, who was opposite her, danced with a zeal which deserved the greatest praise. He persisted in taking little steps, and even tried to cut some capers. The perspiration rolled down his forehead after the second figure, but he did not take a step the less on that account. He was a conscientious dancer, who during the time of the Empire must have been very much sought after.

The little girl skipped right and left, and got mixed up with everybody. She was always behind me when she ought to have been opposite; but I

didn't care anything for that. I let her stray about at her ease. I would wager that cousin Ravinet had told everybody that I was a famous dancer, for they pressed around us, they made a crowd about our quadrille, and these honest people must have been very much disappointed because I only walked through it. I even heard some voices muttering, —

"Well, it wasn't worth while to put ourselves out for that. I can dance better than that myself. Ravinet is blind apparently. He doesn't even know the Basque step."

I tried to talk to the bride.

"You must be tired, madame."

"Me? Why should I?"

"You've probably been dancing for a long time."

"Mercy! if the bride didn't dance that would be a pretty thing. It was quite right of them to make me dance. They invited these gentlemen here for that."

"This has been a very fine day, has it not, madame?"

"A fine day! oh, you only mean that it is amusing now, but all day long I thought that it was very stupid."

"Oh! you thought that, did you? However, you probably love the person whom you have married."

"Oh, yes. I like him well enough, but I'm not over fond of him. That will come later on. My father tells me that will come later on."

"Should I be indiscreet if I were to ask you what your husband does?"

"My husband? He sells sponges at wholesale. We shall have a sponge shop."

"That must be a good business."

"Mercy! I don't know. It can't be very amusing to be always in the midst of sponges, but we shall not have a dog at any rate. Oh, that was one of the first conditions of my marriage."

"Oh! so you wouldn't have a dog. Apparently, you hate those animals."

"Mercy! no, I like all the beasts I do, but it's because of the song."

"Oh! is there a song on dogs?"

"On the sponge-dealer's dog. What, don't you know it?"

"No, I confess it is totally unknown to me."

"It's a comic song, each verse ends with 'It's the sponge-dealer's dog.' Everybody knows that refrain, and my father said to Pamphile, 'If you have a dog, they'll always be singing that refrain when they see it and that may do you harm in your business.' Then Pamphile said to him, 'I shall never have one, I'll take my oath on it,' and I married him. My father did well, didn't he?"

"I admire M. Bocal's foresight."

"He also made it a condition that my mother-in-law should not live with us."

"As to that, I agree with him, for mothers-in-law seldom agree with their children."

“And Madame Girie less than anybody else. Why, she’s one who would make disturbances if she could, and all the while she would declare she adored her children. It’s surprising how they could be happy with her. Pamphile’s brother, the youngest, was very delicate, or so she said. She was always giving him medicine, making him take herb tea and injections. When he would come home in the evening, after he had been dining anywhere, Madame Girie would wait for him on the staircase with a syringe. If he refused an injection, she followed him into all the rooms with her syringe. The next day she would give him medicine without telling him. She would put manna in his coffee. Finally she so persecuted the poor boy with what she called her little attentions, that one fine morning he went off and enlisted. He became a dragoon, he preferred that to her syringe.”

“By Jove! I think I should have done the same in his place.”

“Madame Girie said that he was an ungrateful fellow. She wanted her other son, Pamphile, not to marry unless he could stay with her. You can imagine that that did not tempt him, especially as Madame Girie wanted to manage the house, and then she was always disputing with the customers. One day she refused to sell a gentleman any sponges on the pretext that he had not bowed when he came in; another time, it was a lady who had spoken to her as if she were a maid; in short, if she had re-

mained for long with Pamphile his house of business would have been deserted. No one would come to buy of him. Finally, here we are married. He's pensioned off Madame Girie, but you'll see that won't suffice her; she's never had two farthings' worth of management, she spends everything. Oh, it is us now, monsieur, it's our turn."

When the figure had ended, the bride said to me mockingly, —

"It seems to me that I don't need to dance so very well to dance with you. They said you danced so well!"

"Madame, your cousin Ravinet was mistaken in saying I danced so well."

"Oh! as to that, if you were dancing with the lady who was your partner just now you would skip higher perhaps."

"I beg you to believe that no dancer would make me jump any higher."

"Freluchon dances very prettily, and he bounds like a rubber ball."

"It is a natural gift, and I do not share it with that gentleman. Is he one of your relatives?"

"Freluchon? no he's the head shopman in papa's shop; he wept when he learned I was going to be married."

"The devil he did, was it with pleasure?"

"Pooh, it was with something else; but I consoled him. I told him that all my life I would be his friend, and that he might kiss me on Sundays."

"I can conceive, madame, that such a prospect dried his tears."

At length the quadrille ended. I led back the bride and stealthily avoided the glasses of hot wine that were circulating on all sides. Someone took my arm, I started with fright, fearing it was again M. Bocal or little Ravinet. But it was Balloquet, who led me into a corner of the hall, where we sat down on an unoccupied bench. The doctor seemed to be very cheerful ; he even laughed before speaking to me.

"Well, my dear Rochebrune, I hope we've succeeded in our undertaking, eh? What a good idea that was of mine when I proposed to you to come to these weddings."

"Yes, but tell me now, if I had not come with M. Bocal's landlord, it seems to me that you would have had an ugly quarter of an hour. What the devil have you done now?"

"Nothing, just a joke. That little woman with whom I was talking just now went to my head, and then there's so much to drink here that it's frightful. By Jove! when I was dancing with the bride I pinched her; that idiot, M. Pamphile, kept saying, 'My wife is as firm as a rock.' I wanted to see if he was correct and I assure you that he flattered himself; but now that's all done with, everything is settled, the bride adores him. What do you think of this wedding?"

"I like the one where I am better."

"And how did you get along over there?"

"I was very much embarrassed, but two charming ladies took me under their protection. Later on I found a gentleman who knew me. For all that, my dear Balloquet, don't be so imprudent as to come into the other ballroom. The company is altogether different to this. They might question you and —"

"Don't be uneasy, I find myself very comfortable here, and here I shall remain. In the first place they are going to give us some supper, and I always had a weakness for that kind of entertainment. Then I have a little affair of my own in hand, I'm chaffing a brunette, the one with whom I was talking just now; she suits me down to the ground. I shall give her my custom. Madame Satiné, Boulevard des Italiens, beautiful neighborhood, where they sell very expensive gloves. She calls herself a widow, so you see everything is agreeable. She's not an airy nymph, but a woman as solid as a post, and not at all prudent. We are to dine together tomorrow, that is already settled."

"I congratulate you, you go straight to the point."

"And are you getting any fun out of it over there?"

"I have got up an acquaintance with a charming lady, but I do not yet know if it will go any further."

"Is it she with whom you came here?"

“No, that is my second protectress.”

“Do you know she has quite a — well, a military air. Confound it, she made eyes at me.”

“Yes, there is something rather decided in her manner, she has some mind, some originality, but it is not she whom I am courting.”

“Oh, indeed ; why who is the old lady standing in front of us making faces ?”

I raised my eyes and recognized Madame Girie, who had stopped in front of Balloquet and me, looking straight at us, making faces and smiling and indulging in a pantomime which had certainly the object of making us speak to her ; there was no way of escaping, for when I raised my eyes to her, Madame Girie made me a curtsey, as if she were dancing a minuet, and approached me, saying with an air which indicated that the mistress of the house wished to make herself recognized, —

“Monsieur, has anyone offered you some punch, some bishop, have you taken anything ?”

“Yes, madame, I am infinitely obliged to you, I have taken a great many things.”

“Monsieur Bocal is so heedless, he shouts a good deal, he is noisy, he looks as if he wanted to manage everything, but in the end he does nothing and if I were not here to look after things — I am the bridegroom’s mother, monsieur.”

“That is very apparent, madame,” said Balloquet, rising and bowing to Madame Girie ; then he went off and left me there.

I should very much have liked to do the same as Balloquet, but Madame Girie had taken his place ; she had seated herself beside me and looked as if she were going to stay there. I felt a cold perspiration break out upon me. The bridegroom's mother turned towards me and continued the conversation.

"Yes, monsieur, I am the bridegroom's mother; that fine fellow is my son, he resembles me, does he not, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, he has an air of you."

"An air of me, the very thing, you have found the correct expression. He wished to marry, but I wanted to keep him for myself. I said to him, 'Stay with your mother, you'll be a great deal happier, what more do you want?'"

"Why, madame, it seems to me that a mother cannot replace a wife, and I thought the greatest happiness a mother could have was to see her grandchildren about her."

Madame Girie drew from her pocket a handkerchief rank with snuff, and answered, —

"Oh, monsieur, certainly a person has a right to marry, but then he ought to choose well, and that is so difficult."

"Are you not satisfied with the choice your son has made?"

"Hum, hum, monsieur, I am not going to say anything wrong of my daughter-in-law. I am incapable of it, but if I wanted to make mischief —

In the first place, she's as stupid as an owl, is that poor Pétronille. As for that, you've danced with her and you must have seen it."

"Why, no, I thought her simple, natural."

"Ha, ha, ha! yes very simple, did you not? You put it very kindly. In fact, Pamphile was smitten with her and I don't know why, for she isn't pretty."

"She's very fresh looking."

"Mercy! as if everyone isn't fresh looking at her age, but that'll wear off, I won't give her three years to get frightful. Then they've brought her up so singularly. Having no mother, you can understand she's done just as she liked. All day long alone with the shopmen, young men; I think she even went down to the cellar with them. Fie, what manners! As if I should have chosen such a woman as that to be my son's wife; but he wouldn't listen to me when I said to him, 'You will repent of it?' Monsieur, you see, some time back there was a certain Freluchon, one of M. Bocal's shopmen, who was very much in love with Pétronille. Everybody knew that; she herself didn't hide it, she laughed about it. A modest young lady does not laugh at such things as that. This Freluchon taught her to swim, do you understand, monsieur? to swim—in the river. She went right in the water with him. That's nice, that is! And Pamphile thought that all right, although I said to him, 'Take care what you're doing.' Ah! monsieur, how stupid men are when they're in love."

"That is very true, madame, but it does no honor to your sex. If women were, in fact, such as the men suppose them to be when they are in love, the latter would not be so very stupid in adoring them."

Madame Girie compressed her lips, shook her head and smiled as she murmured,—

"Thank Heaven! all women are not like Pétronille."

"And all mothers-in-law do not resemble you, madame."

I don't know whether Madame Girie took that for a compliment, but she made me a very low bow; as for me, I had had quite enough of this lady's stories. I rose and left the wedding at the back, where the smell of hot wine and punch was becoming unbearable.

On re-entering the Dablémar rooms I could breathe more freely. Here a pleasant odor of patchouli replaced that of warm wine, which at the other place was fortified by various other emanations; here, in fact, the temperature was bearable and the faces were not shining with intoxication, with violent exercise and with the heat, which had given to those other physiognomies a varnish which by no means embellished them.

My first care was to seek Madame Sordeville I saw pretty Armantine, but she was talking with her friend Frédérique, and near her was a young man whom I had not before perceived in the ballroom. This new personage, who might have been twenty-

eight or thirty, was got up with extreme elegance ; he was dark, and his artistically parted and curled hair was admirably glossy. A long, pale, face, regular features, black eyes, rather deep-set, a sensitive, reserved mouth, a small mustache, very regularly cut, made him rather a handsome fellow, but an air of self-sufficiency, of fatuity, which was almost impertinent, was apparent in the bearing and manners of this gentleman, who from the very first, and without my knowing why, displeased me immensely

We often experience sympathy or antipathy like this for people with whom we are not acquainted, but even when we have made more ample acquaintance with the same persons, it is rarely that we do not find the first impression of our hearts justified. There is, then, in us a second sight, that of the soul, which warns us when we are before a friend or an enemy. This gentleman was talking with the two ladies, and he spoke to them with a lack of ceremony which seemed to denote great intimacy. He might have been the lover of one or the other of them ; suppose he were that of both of them ! that is sometimes seen ; what was certain was that the gentleman did not look like a discreet lover.

You must think that I have a very bad opinion of women, but it is not exactly of women, it is of people in general that I have a sad opinion. That is not my fault. Why have they so often given me occasion to think ill of them ? I did not draw nearer, for the presence of this fine gentleman vexed me,

but I watched them. I should have been very unskilful indeed had I not been able to divine with which of these ladies the gentleman was on the better footing. There are some little nothings by which people always betray themselves, unless they are perfectly on their guard, and still — ah, I have it now. One hand supported a little too familiarly on the gentleman's knee; a long look, which expressed those things that one does not say before everybody, had shown me that this handsome fellow must be intimately connected with Madame Dauberny. I experienced a feeling of joy, for I had feared for a moment lest it should be my charming partner. Frankly, that would have given me pain; which showed me that I was decidedly in love with her.

I drew nearer and spoke to Madame Sordeville, who answered me with her usual amiability; but while I was talking with that lady I perceived that the fine gentleman with the mustaches was weighing me, examining me in an almost impertinent fashion.

There are in this world people whose impertinent look, forcing you to a reprisal, is a kind of defiance which clearly signifies, "Have you anything to say to me? I am waiting, and I'm quite ready to answer you." As this fine dandy did not desist from glaring at me, I looked at him in the manner I have just spoken of to you. The dandy lowered his eyes and turned his head away, which

was extremely fortunate for him, but you may be certain that from that moment the gentleman and I could not bear each other. As it appeared to vex him to see me talking and laughing with pretty Armantine I carried on a very lively conversation, and as the lady was easily provoked to laughter we were very merry indeed.

Madame Dauberny whispered to the young man, I saw that he frowned slightly and compressed his lips tightly. Was she telling him what she had done to relieve me from my embarrassment? What did it matter to me, after all, whether that pleased the gentleman or not. Madame Frédérique no longer seemed so good-looking to me, decidedly she was not pretty, and then what she had said to me in our last conversation had considerably cooled my liking for her.

Madame Sordeville was engaged for the next contra-dance, but she promised me the following one. Someone came to get her for the quadrille. Frédérique took her place in the dance with her handsome dark friend. What was I to do during this contra-dance? At a fashionable ball where one knows nobody, one is never more thoroughly bored than when one is not dancing.

I recalled the advice that lady had given me before the arrival of her Sigisbé and sought M. Sordeville. I perceived Armantine's husband in the neighboring room, near a group of men, the greater part of whom wore decorations. He was not talking,

but he was listening to them. I was approaching him, but he came to meet me.

"You are no longer dancing, M. Rochebrune."

"I am resting."

"I wager that my wife is not resting, she is indefatigable."

"Your wife is dancing, in fact, and Madame Dauberny also, with a young man whom I had not before noticed, a dark man with a mustache."

"Oh, Saint-Bergame. Yes, he came very late, according to his custom; it produces more effect, makes people wish for him to come. Ha, ha! you must know him; besides, if you are a friend of Madame Dauberny's infancy, you must have met him often at her house."

"I hadn't seen Madame Dauberny for quite a long time."

"Then it was during that time that she made Saint-Bergame's acquaintance. Their connection hardly dates back beyond six months, but he is, nevertheless, on a very good footing with her, as is easily seen."

The manner in which M. Sordeville said this left me no doubt that he had the same opinion as I as to the relations that existed between the lady and gentleman. I felt rather surprised if he thought that, that he should suffer the great intimacy that seemed to exist between his wife and Madame Dauberny. Was he not afraid that the bad example might be contagious? or did M. Dauberny's conduct render

that of his wife excusable? Or, on the other hand, was M. Sordeville one of those philosophical husbands who treat all those things as trifles which do not deserve their attention? I am tempted to think that my last conjecture is the most correct.

"Who is this M. Saint-Bergame?" said I, after a moment.

"Hum, I don't exactly know. However, he gives himself out for a journalist, but you know now, a man is a journalist as he is a lawyer. Everybody works on a newspaper, or at least everybody wants to make you think they do."

"I know the occupation of a newspaper man is honorable when it is exercised discreetly, when he writes impartially; I don't say with merit, with taste, that should be the *sine qua non* of admission to that business. Unfortunately it is not always thus since the newspapers have multiplied. All the unsuccessful authors become journalists. Those dramatists who have not managed to get their pieces played fall furiously on the authors who have succeeded. Fortunately the real public does justice to all that. Often even the excessive insults of which a man of talent is the butt increase the interest that people have in him; and after all it is, it seems to me, a very sad thing to pass one's life in tearing to pieces those who produce. It is the same old story of the *bouc du serail*, 'He does nothing, and injures those who wish to do something.'"

"You do not seem to admire journalists."

"I think a great deal of them when they have talent, and are decent in their methods of criticism. I knew one very popular literary man who laughed till he cried at the furious attacks made upon his works by newspaper men. 'If I were not successful,' he said to me, 'those men would not honor me with their hate. They would not speak of me, or rather, in their benevolence, they would address compliments to me. Ah, my dear fellow, congratulate me; not everyone who wishes can have enemies.' But to return to M. de Saint-Bergame, upon what paper is he employed?"

"By Jove! I can't tell you—on a new sheet, on several perhaps—he has the reputation of being very severe, and is proud of it."

"He has no reason to be so. Nothing is easier than to speak evil; that is always the foundation of the conversation of cooks and porters."

"I believe that Saint-Bergame has had a grand play in verse accepted at the Odéon or at the Français, unless it is at the Théâtre Historique. But he has been talking about the piece for a very long time, and he is the only one who speaks of it."

"And are those the only titles that gentleman has to the admiration of his contemporaries?"

"I am not aware of any others. For the rest, he's a handsome fellow, dresses well, follows all the fashions; he's a squire of dames, and you must not be surprised if the ladies aspire to the honor of his conquest."

"Oh, I am surprised at nothing now."

"But do you not cultivate the muses, M. Rochebrune? It seems to me that I have heard songs, ballads, of which you were doubly the author, for you had written both words and music."

"Yes, monsieur, I admit it, but because one writes a song one is no more a literary man than one is a composer because he has written a tune and set it to an accompaniment on the piano."

"Modest on your part, monsieur; you will not make me believe that a person can compose a tune without being something of a musician."

"He may be like Jean-Jacques, who had not the slightest notion of counterpoint."

"I don't know as to Rousseau's knowledge of music, but I should very much like someone to write another 'Devin du Village.'"

"As to that, monsieur, I am of your opinion, even if they were to add a new orchestration to it."

"My wife plays the piano rather well and sings, and on Tuesdays she and several other amateurs have a little music at my house. If it is agreeable to you, come and hear them, come and join them."

"You are very good, monsieur, it will give me great pleasure. I am never tired of music."

"Then, monsieur, we shall expect you on Tuesday for certain. As for that, you will always be welcome. Do you know our address?"

"No, I do not."

"Here is my card."

Monsieur Sordeville left me after giving me one of his cards. "Upon my honor," I reflected, "this husband is delightful. He forestalled my wishes. However, he doesn't look like a simpleton. Oh, no, he can't be one of those husbands who see nothing that is going on in their houses. Madame Frédérique rightly guessed that he would invite me."

All these things puzzled me but I could see nothing in them adverse to me. Madame Sordeville was very pretty, very seductive. I felt that I could be very fond of her. I did not know whether she followed the example of her friend Frédérique, but I had permission to present myself at her house and that was something gained.

As soon as the quadrille was finished I sought the place taken by these ladies. M. Saint-Bergame was still with them, but he did not frighten me, he merely bored me. I do not know whether the invitation I had received had given somewhat of a triumphant expression to my countenance, but when she saw me Madame Sordeville smiled and exchanged a glance with her friend. I would have given I know not what to know what that look meant!

Monsieur Saint-Bergame compressed his lips, saying to Madame Dauberny with affected familiarity,—

"Do you intend to remain here much longer?"

"Why not? there is nothing to hurry me. I am quite sure M. Dauberny will not sit up for me."

"This wedding seems dreadfully dull to me."

"How amiable you are! I am enjoying myself immensely."

"Oh, but you, madame, would enjoy yourself anywhere!"

"At all events that shows that I have a good disposition."

"It's rather homogeneous, there are some queer-looking faces here!"

"Well, try to write a funny article, that will be a stroke of luck for you."

"Really, you are very biting this evening."

"I thought you were accustomed to that."

"You know, madame, the next contra-dance belongs to me," said I to Madame Sordeville.

"Yes, monsieur, certainly. I have not forgotten."

She made this answer in a very charming way, Women have a way of saying the slightest things that makes them of very great value to us. That also depends on the disposition in which one finds one's self.

The orchestra began to play; it was a polka. I looked sadly at my pretty partner and said,—

"Do you dance the polka?"

"No, I waltz, but I do not dance the polka."

"But I do," said Madame Dauberny holding out her hand to me, "and you know how well we keep step together. Will you see if we can do as well here as at M. Bocal's?"

What a strange woman! She said this to me as though we had been acquainted for ten years. I

thought her very pretty at this moment; I took her hand and began to dance. It amused me all the more because I had noticed the horrible grimace that Saint-Bergame made.

We went round for some time without speaking and, vanity aside, I thought we did very well. After circling twicaround the ballroom, I could no longer contain myself and I muttered, —

“The man who was with you does not dance the polka then?”

“I was sure you would say that to me.”

She began to laugh. In fact, my question was very silly. But I am apt to say such things, and realize what I have said when too late. For fear of again committing myself I remained silent. Then my partner said to me, —

“Did you speak to M. Sordeville again?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And he has invited you to go to his house?”

“Yes, madame.”

“What did I tell you? We guessed that just now from your radiant expression.”

Then I knew what that glance had meant that passed between them upon my approach. But I did not like that “we guessed that”; this community of thoughts and feelings pleased me little. I have always noticed that ladies who tell each other everything and communicate to each other even the most secret thoughts of their hearts never have much to confide to their lovers. Friendship

nearly always injures love. That is not what I understand by a deep attachment, a real sentiment. But what was I thinking of?

I led the indefatigable Frédérique to her friend. The handsome dandy was not there, and I heard Madame de Sordeville say in a low tone,—

“He has gone. He said he should take himself off, he was furious.”

“Really? Well, it is all the same to me?”

But the gentleman had not gone. I saw him walking about at a distance. If he was jealous of me, he was very wrong. I was thinking only of Madame Sordeville now, and I impatiently waited for the quadrille that I might speak to her more freely.

This moment at length arrived. I was with my lady, each cavalier was occupying himself with his happy moment! And what a beautiful invention is dancing! I felt I must put my time to good use. I told the lady that her husband had kindly invited me to go to her house. She smiled and did not answer. I could not content myself with that.

“Will you make me happy by deigning to ratify the invitation I have received?”

“All that my husband does is well, I can only approve it.”

This answer was polite; but that was all. The lady seemed preoccupied. It is always rather unflattering when the person with whom we are talking seems absent-minded; and when that person is a

woman with whom we are in love it is even more mortifying. I had been about to make a declaration of love—but it remained on the tip of my tongue. Could this pretty woman be only a flirt who was amusing herself at my expense? I had been on the point of forgetting all she had done for me this evening; wounded self-esteem renders a person very unjust. I reminded myself that one should not go too fast either in one's judgment or in one's love affairs.

The dance ended; some of the guests were already taking their departure. Madame Sordeville rejoined her friend, who also seemed disposed to go. Why should I stay longer at this ball? I had permission to present myself at the charming Armantine's, which was all I could have desired for that night.

I left. As I passed the rooms where they were celebrating the Bocal wedding, I heard a great deal of noise. Were they enjoying themselves or were they quarrelling? By Jove! let Balloquet take care of himself, I was going to bed.

CHAPTER VII

A SCAMP. MADAME LANDERNOY

UPON the day after this well-employed night, I did not awaken until almost noon. I reviewed in memory the events of the evening before. When one has done so many things and heard so many stories, it is quite permissible to be a little mixed in one's thoughts.

Madame Sordeville's pretty face quickly came to my mind. Now that I no longer had the illusion of the surroundings of a ballroom, the sounds of music to go to my head, I endeavored to imagine what kind of a woman she could be, and if there was any hope of succeeding in paying her court.

She was pretty, graceful, amiable, witty even—at least she possessed that wit which lends animation to a conversation—I did not yet know whether it went any deeper. In regard to that, women are more deceitful than men; no one is better able than are they to throw dust in one's eyes. Too often this flood of words and of sallies is only whipped cream, which will not stand the test of time.

Madame Sordeville was necessarily a coquette; as has so often been said, all women are; but there

are shades, gradations. There are those pleasing coquettes who give piquancy to love; there are others who never allow a lover a moment's rest or quiet; and, to be frank, is there an unhappier acquaintance than that of a woman who takes pleasure in tormenting one?—not that I was in this case. This lady could perhaps never be anything to me—however, her husband did not appear to be at all jealous.

The stories that had been told yesterday at the dinner table came back to my mind; one there was above all which had impressed me vividly, and I was surprised that I could have so long forgotten that young girl from Sceaux—that poor Mignonne to whom Fouvenard had behaved so shamefully. Was it not enough to abandon her, after making her a mother, without throwing her against her will into the arms of another? Such a trick was horrible! Men are punished who have not done half as much as Fouvenard—and all because she loved him. Unhappy girl!—and she was positively on the point of becoming a mother. I felt that I must see her, that I must try to soften her sufferings. She was perhaps in the deepest poverty. He told us, I think, eighty Rue Ménilmontant. I made up my mind to go there; hoping, however, that the man had lied to us, for it would be too odious if it were true.

I rang for my servant. He came in. He was a rather simple fellow, but I thought him faithful, and

that quality being very rare in any social position, I kept Pomponne in my service; although he very often annoyed me by his awkwardness and stupidity, and although he was so extremely curious, for which I was often obliged to scold him.

Pomponne gave me everything that was necessary, but as he moved about me I noticed that he looked doubly silly, which always indicated that he had something to say to me and did not know how to begin, and I should have to forestall his news.

"What stupidity have you been at since yesterday, Pomponne?"

"Me, monsieur; why do you ask that? You didn't order me to do anything of the kind."

"Why, usually you do not await my permission for that. You haven't any letters for me?"

"No, monsieur."

"No visitors have come for me while I was asleep?"

"Visitors?"

"Yes, visitors."

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"You don't think so, you're not sure of it, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I am sure of it."

"What the devil is the matter with you this morning that you look so much stupider than you usually do?"

"It seems to me I'm just as usual."

"Come, brush my hair, and hurry, it's late."

You must know that M. Pomponne was very skilful at hairdressing; that and his fidelity made him, as you may see, a rather noticeable person. He had studied for some time to be a hairdresser, and had left it, so he told me, because having a great deal of hair, they had continually used his head as a model for those who were beginning their profession to study curling and crimping upon, and that had proved very irritating to his scalp.

"And what about the love affairs, Pomponne, how are they going on?"

My servant reddened; you see he was no libertine.

"Oh, monsieur, I have no love affairs."

"Oh, you want to pretend that you are very discreet with me. What about that maid at the old gentleman's opposite? You're not courting her, eh, you scamp?"

"Oh, monsieur, I only laugh and joke with her a bit, that's all."

"Everyone knows what it means when a fellow laughs with the maids."

"As for that, I believe I am going to lose poor Mademoiselle Rosalie."

"Is she ill?"

"No, monsieur, but I meant to say that she is probably going to leave the house. She has discharged her master."

"What! 'She has discharged her master'! You

mean to say that her master has discharged her, of course."

"No, monsieur, I assure you she said to me, 'I don't want any more of my master. I've discharged him.' She even added, 'I told him to go hang.'"

"The devil she did! It seems to me that Mademoiselle Rosalie is rather free in her language—and why is she leaving her master? She is with a rich man and a widower, and that's a very comfortable situation, above all for a damsel who makes use of the expression 'Go hang.'"

"It appears, monsieur, that her master would not pay her."

"Come, what are you talking about? that is not possible. My old neighbor is known to pay very well and to have no debts."

"Excuse me, monsieur, they had a discussion. I must tell you that Mademoiselle Rosalie has a strange custom. She gets paid for every separate thing."

"I don't understand, hasn't she any wages?"

"Yes, monsieur, she has a hundred crowns salary."

"Well, that's all right."

"When she goes on an errand, when her master sends her, for instance, to carry a letter to one of his friends or elsewhere, well, that's fifteen sous. She charges fifteen sous commission. When she has to wash the windows, that's twenty sous; when

she has to wax the floor, that's twenty-five sous, you understand?"

"Precisely. Then it's just as if the gentleman had no servant; that's very agreeable."

"She calls that putting the master on a good footing."

"You just try to put me on that footing, I should send you away immediately."

"It seems, however, that Rosalie's master said nothing about all that, but the other evening as he had made her warm his bed, and the next day she had charged him twelve sous for that, it seems that he got angry. I said to her, 'Mamzelle, it seems to me that you might at least warm your master's bed for nothing.' But she cried, 'The idea, he would get into the habit of having me do it.'"

"By Jove! this maid is a woman of business."

"She is, monsieur, she told me that she carries thirty-six francs to the savings bank every month."

"And she earns only twenty-five francs of wages. She must be a very economical girl."

While talking with Pomponne, I detected an odor which never pollutes my apartments.

"Pomponne," said I, suddenly, "have you been smoking this morning?"

"Me! monsieur, you know I never smoke."

"However, there's a smell of tobacco here, not a cigar, the smell of a pipe and bad tobacco, too."

My servant smiled and tried to look shrewd, and leaning towards me said, in a low tone, —

"I know who that is, that is the other."

"What other?"

"The individual who is waiting down there in the antechamber."

"What, there's someone waiting for me and you did not tell me!"

"Oh, that's because he told me that he wasn't in a hurry."

"And you told me that no visitors had come."

"He's not a visitor. I heard you say once, 'When this person comes again to ask to see me, if I have anybody here call me immediately and don't let him come in.'"

I trembled as I guessed who was there, and stammered, "Is that who it is?"

"Yes, monsieur, it's the individual called Ballangier, who is so unceremonious, who puts himself at his ease, acts as though he were at home here."

I felt that a weight was placed on my chest. In one moment all my cheerful thoughts had vanished. A feeling of sadness had replaced them. The name, the presence of Ballangier always produced this effect upon me.

"Has the gentleman been here long?"

"By Jove! monsieur, he had been here almost three-quarters of an hour before you rang."

"Didn't you tell him that I had been to a ball and that I might sleep very late?"

"Yes, monsieur. I said all that, but he answered

me, as he sat down, 'That'll suit me' — Wait a bit, what was it he said? Ah — 'That will suit me, I shall have time to rest,' and then he lit a pipe that he had pulled from his pocket. I ventured to say to him, 'Don't smoke here, my master doesn't like the smell,' and he shouted at me, 'I smoke everywhere; besides, you can open the windows and burn some brown sugar.'"

"Ask this—gentleman to come here, and leave us, and if anyone should call while he's here, remember, Pomponne, that I am not in to anybody."

"Yes, monsieur, the same as usual."

My servant departed, and almost immediately the person who had been waiting came into my room. Ballangier was thirty-four. He looked older, because for a long time past he had been very intemperate in everything. Excesses and debauchery make a man grow old before his time. Figure to yourselves a man who was rather tall and would have been well-built had he not contracted the habit of stooping at the shoulders. His face was refined and regular; an aquiline nose, a small mouth and very black eyes, surmounted by thick eyebrows; a great deal of hair, which had been black also, but which was becoming gray. All this would have formed an agreeable whole, had it not been spoiled by a very common look, a glance that was either impudent, or stupid through drunkenness, and manners often brutal. What was more, his dress was always extremely dirty, sometimes ragged,

and he had the gait of a drummer. This may give you some idea of the personage. Upon this occasion he wore a brown overcoat, which was neither in holes nor ripped. It lacked only two buttons in front, but it was stained everywhere. His black trousers were horribly dirty, as were his shoes; as to his linen, it was not perceivable. He had a dirty, frayed collar round his neck, and held in his hand a round hat which looked as if it had received a good many knocks. As he came into my room, Ballangier took his pipe from his mouth. He came swaggering in, nodded his head and smiled at me, then stretched himself in an armchair, saying, —

“Here I am, and how goes everything, Charles?”

“Very well, I thank you.”

“It seems you were at a wedding yesterday and slept late this morning. You’re right to amuse yourself, I should like to do nothing else myself.”

“Why, it seems to me that up to the present you have hardly done anything else except that.”

“Hang it, what I’ve done is very small potatoes! To let one’s self go, one must have plenty of the ready. Everything is so dear nowadays, those thieves of wine merchants and cook-shop keepers no longer give credit.”

“They are right.”

“What do you mean by saying ‘they are right’?”

“Because several times already you’ve run up debts which would never have been paid had I not settled them.”

"Who says that I never pay my debts; but they must give people time. Why such a hurry?"

"Ballangier, you make me sorry for you. Ought you to say such things to me?"

"Well, what's the matter, can't I speak now?"

"You can dispense with lying to me; I know you too well, and know what your conduct is. When a man who possesses nothing wants to keep his engagements, he says to himself, 'I'll go to work and earn some money,' for, as I have often enough told you, there is no other way to make an honorable position in the world. Can't you understand that everybody here below must work, from the smallest to the greatest; from the most modest clerks to the highest functionaries; from the workmen to the artists? Even the rich, whose lot you envy?—for idlers, men who do nothing, naturally envy the rich. Well, those who have fortune are obliged to take care of it, and to direct and watch the conduct of those whom they employ; to order their expenses, and if they wish to preserve their fortune do not imagine that they pass all their lives in amusing themselves."

Ballangier spread himself out in the armchair, shook the ashes from his pipe and looked at me impudently, as he exclaimed,—

"And do you work—you, who moralize so well? How do you employ yourself? I don't know what your occupation is, but I don't think it's very fatiguing."

I could not master a movement of indignation ; this man's ingratitude revolted me. He owed everything to me, but I soon calmed myself ; there was a memory before which my anger vanished, and I answered him very quietly, —

“ In the first place, I had the right to dispense with an occupation since my father left me fifteen thousand francs income.”

“ I didn't say you had done wrong, I don't blame you, my dear fellow ; but then, I was not so wrong just now.”

“ Permit me, will you listen to me ; although I had a fortune I did, in the first place, begin to study for the law. Some time later, as I loved art, I studied, one by one, music, painting, sculpture. Then I made some verses, I wrote a poem ; bad, very possibly, but to which, nevertheless, I consecrated some of my nights. You see, therefore, that I have done something ; and if I were to lose now what remains of my fortune, with the little skill I have acquired, I could still live honorably and without having recourse to anybody. Is it the same with you, who possess nothing, who have no expectations for the future—and yet you never wanted to do anything, to learn anything—who, instead of keeping in the sphere in which you were born, have cast yourself into vicious society and assumed the tastes, the habits and manners of those people who avoid all decent society ?”

“ What do you mean ? what do you mean ? I

am a cabinet-maker; isn't that a decent trade? One would think to hear you that I worked at night, making butter tubs."

"Oh, monsieur, I despise no trade. I esteem all men who conduct themselves honorably; the workman, the mechanic, the ploughman, all have a right to my esteem and consideration when they are honest and straightforward. I repeat to you there are no unworthy trades. It is the vicious, idle, debauched men who, no matter in what class they are found, must be the objects of our disdain and whom we must despise. You call yourself a workman, but you are lying, you are nothing of the sort, no more of a cabinet-maker than anything else—because you will do nothing; because work gives you no pleasure, bores you; because you've got into the way of passing your time in gambling dens or wine-shops, or in other dens of vice where you are acquainted or connected with those wretches who are the curse of society—and at thirty-four, you conduct yourself thus! I see well you are incorrigible."

Ballangier angrily threw his pipe on the floor, exclaiming, —

"Confound it, you weary me to death. If I am incorrigible, I don't see why you should preach me such a sermon as that."

"I have the right to preach to you. If you had followed my advice, listened to my prayers, you would not now be where you are, and besides, if

my sermons weary you, why do you come to my place? I have forbidden you to do so. Don't I remit regularly every three months the pension that I willingly give you, although I am not obliged to do so, as you know. Not a fortnight ago, I myself took it to your porter."

"Precisely, and that is just what I do not want. He kept half of it, the old crab."

"Kept it! You said yourself he was an honest man; and he kept money from you?"

"He pretended that I owed him money and for things from the pork shop, for carrying letters and other absurd things."

"If you owed him, he had a right to pay himself."

"I should have paid him later on, he had no right to pay himself. The law doesn't allow him to do so, does it? You ought to know that if you studied for the law."

"Well, what do you want here today? Why did you come here?"

"I wanted to tell you that I am going to move. I won't stay in a house where the porters are not considerate. Say, now, haven't you got a little glass of something to offer me? I came out fasting this morning, I have done a good many errands and I'm all tired out. Come, Charlie, be obliging, don't make a face like a baby, you know very well that I am a friend."

I did not answer, but I opened a chest containing

some bottles of liqueurs. I took one, and a small glass, which I placed before Ballangier. He ran immediately to the bottle and filled the glass to the brim, saying to me, —

“Are you not going to touch glasses with me?”

“No, I never drink liqueurs in the morning.”

“Just as you like, there’s no accounting for tastes. You’re too dainty, you are. I could drink half a pint of rum without winking. This is anisette, this is; it’s a liqueur for women; it’s as sweet as a lamb; all the same, it isn’t bad.”

“What are you doing now, Ballangier, are you working anywhere? Come, speak frankly to me.”

“I’ll tell you the truth as it is. Do you suppose I have anything to hide from you? I always pour out all my sorrows on your breast?”

“Why did you come here today?”

“I’m going to relate the circumstances to you, but haven’t you something a little stiffer than this to give me? Your anisette sickens me. Tell me where it is and I won’t disturb you.”

“I have nothing else to give you, besides I don’t wish to give you anything else. If I were to listen to you, you would go home from here tipsy. It’s quite enough that I allow you to smoke here. You know very well that it displeases me.”

“They smoke in the best society.”

“Make an end of it, monsieur. Why did you come here in spite of my forbidding you?”

“Oh, ‘monsieur’! what a tone? You are in a

very bad humor today, monseigneur. Fortunately, I am not afraid of anybody."

I tried to calm my irritation. I placed myself in front of my glass and arranged my cravat, then I finished dressing myself. M. Ballangier, seeing that I paid no more attention to him, poured himself out another glass of anisette, then, trying to take a pitiful tone, he murmured, —

"I know very well that I don't amount to anything, that I've often done very foolish things; that is true, but youth will pass. Mine has been rather a long one, but whose fault is that? And is it just at the moment when I wish to correct my faults and settle down and become steady that I ought to be treated like a dog?"

Ballangier stopped and looked at me. I did not breathe a word. He resumed, —

"Yes, this time, I have reflected seriously. As you were saying just now, I am no longer young. I must think of my future, and an opportunity has been offered to me, a business which would just suit me nicely. I've already spoken to you of Morillot, a good fellow, who's in the cabinet-making business. He's not a worthless fellow, he's a worker, and I confess that if I had listened to him I shouldn't be so idle as I am now; but Morillot went to Besançon, his country. He always said to me, 'When I have a place for you I'll write, and you shall come.' Well, he's written to me, and he says that if I want to come he has some-

thing that will suit me, and that if I am steady I can soon establish myself at Besançon. It was to tell you that that I came."

I listened to Ballangier without interrupting him. I did not know whether to believe him, he had so often deceived me. It was not easy to read his face, he could assume any expression he wished. He even wept when he thought it might serve his plans.

"If this Morillot has really made you such a proposition, why don't you go?" said I at length.

"Ah, you're kind you are, that's easy to say, but I can't go to Besançon dressed as I am now, all in rags. It will give them a bad opinion of me at once. When one hasn't a decent garment, well, you know how stupid people are. Then there's the journey, and besides I'm not going to be paid directly I get there. In short, I haven't a sou since that churl of a porter kept nearly all that you gave him for me. What is more, fifty francs a month isn't any great amount; one can't go very far with that."

"With that one may live, and if you liked to work you would lack for nothing. How many poor women pass their days in sewing, sit up part of the night to add a few sous to their day's pay, and cannot earn the sum that seems too modest to you? But do you forget all that I have done for you? I've tried every means to lead you to a better way of living. The more money I give you,

the more you spend in those infectious dens where you pass your life. I'm tired, in fact, of pandering to your vices. I am doing too much for you."

"Come, come, be calm, what's the use of speaking of the past? What is finished is swept away. Today, in order to put my wardrobe in good condition, to pay my travelling expenses and to have enough when I get there to keep me going till I get the price of my work, I need — mercy! I need quite four hundred francs. Oh, I know very well it's like pulling a tooth out and that I've already cost you a great deal of money, but this time will be the last, and you won't hear of me again. I shall settle at Besançon, they say the Franche-Comté is a good country, besides I am contented anywhere."

I reflected. Ballangier looked at me with a kind of uneasiness. This man had so often lied to me that I dared not put any faith in his words.

"Who is to prove to me the truth of what you've told me?"

"Oh, I suspected that you wouldn't place any faith in my words; but here are some proofs of the thing;" and Ballangier, fumbling in his pocket, triumphantly drew from it a letter which he offered to me. It came from Besançon, it was signed "Morillot," and contained, in fact, all that he had told me. I had already given money to this man, but if I could at last be rid of him and have no fear of again meeting him in Paris, why — that hope decided me,

I opened my desk and took from it four hundred francs in gold and gave it to Ballangier, saying,—
“There, make good use of this money.”

Ballangier became purple with pleasure at receiving the gold pieces. He made a movement as if to throw himself upon my neck, but I took a step backward and he stopped, exclaiming,—

“It is just, I am not worthy, but that will be for another time. I want to become a model of wisdom. In fact, confound it, I want you to be pleased with me. I want to have some self-respect. Au revoir, Charlie, no, I will say good-by, you will like that better, and you are right.”

He said nothing further to me, but went off slowly, and I breathed more freely when he was no longer there.

I had need of some distraction that I might forget the visit I had just received. I thought I would go in search of the young girl from Sceaux.

I had finished dressing, and Pomponne, perceiving that I was getting ready to go out, placed himself in front of me, like a soldier awaiting his orders, and said,—

“Monsieur is going out?”

“As you see.”

“Monsieur has no orders to give me?”

“None.”

“Is monsieur coming back to dinner?”

“Come now, Pomponne, are you becoming entirely idiotic?”

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"Then, why do you put such a question as that to me? You know very well that I never dine at home, that I habitually eat at a table d'hôte."

"That is true, monsieur; however, sometimes you dine at home; when you receive company for instance, ha, ha!"

Pomponne giggled and assumed a mischievous expression, for you must know that I never dine at home except when I entertain there a lady who fears to compromise herself by going to a restaurant. We have ladies who will not go to restaurants but who will go to a gentleman's apartment. I am far from blaming them, let everybody act as they please; but it was a very long time since I had entertained anyone at home. My latest acquaintances had not the slightest repugnance to restaurants, I therefore contented myself with telling Pomponne that he was a blockhead, and went out.

From the Rue Bleue, where I lived, to the Rue Ménilmontant was quite a distance, but the air and the walk would do me good. I thought of my seductive partner, the charming Armantine's image returned incessantly to my thoughts, and when on my way I saw a lady of her height and carriage, I doubled my pace to catch up to her and assure myself that it was not she. I've noticed that love often gives as much occupation to the limbs as to the mind. My amorous ideas had calmed a little when I reached the top of the Rue Ménilmontant,

a street which, by the way, might very well pass for a faubourg. In this neighborhood I no longer met ladies of Armantine's appearance. I said Armantine, which was rather free in speaking of someone I had only known since yesterday, and who had not given me the slightest right to this intimacy; but, when speaking to himself, is not a lover free to give the most loving names to the object of his passion? Even in the delirium of his illusions that does no harm to anybody, and it gives him so much pleasure. It has often been said, and always with reason, "Men are big children, who are always hugging a plaything. With some of them, it is ambition, honors; with others, fortune; with some it is peace, repose—but for the greatest number it is love." To the latter, the image of the beloved woman is the thought which incessantly inspires all their actions.

The number Fouvenard had given was quite a distance along the street I had just entered. I found myself not very far from the barrier. Here, one might believe himself already in the country. I presumed that lodgings could not be very dear, and here was the number I was looking for. It was a very large house. As I went in, I began to ask myself what I was going to say to this young girl whom I did not know, and what I could take as a pretext for my visit. First of all, I would learn if she really lived there. I found a portress almost entirely hidden under two cats and a dog,

who had established themselves on this individual and covered her face, allowing only the tip of her nose to be seen. I asked for Mademoiselle Mignonne, the portress managed to look at me between her cats and answered, —

“Mademoiselle Mignonne, I don’t know her.”

“You don’t know her?”

“My word, no, what does she do?”

“‘What does she do?’ why she works, she sews, she embroiders, I think.”

“We have no one like that in the house, monsieur.”

This Fouvenard had deceived us, his Mignonne was a creation of his imagination. I had been sure of it, and I would much rather that he had lied than to know that this poor girl really existed. I had already left the house; but when I had taken two steps I stopped. I remembered that this young girl also bore another name, that of her family. Perhaps it was under this name that she had rented a lodging in Paris. I retraced my steps, and found the portress again mingled with her animals, I said to her, —

“The person whom I seek is also called Lander-
noy, for Mignonne is only her pet name as a girl.”

“Ah, Landernoy, that’s quite different; if you had asked for that name at once, you would not have had the trouble of coming back.”

“Do you know her, then?”

“Why, certainly, since she stays in this house.

Mamzelle Landernoy — that is to say madame, because, look you, they call her madame now — it's more suitable in her situation. I don't know if you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, yes, very well indeed; in fact, I ought to have said madame."

"Oh, it's not that — We know very well, we others, that she's only been wife on the left hand. In fact, what can you expect? It's only another poor girl who has made a misstep; but that's no reason to throw a stone at her. The good God has said that we must not throw a stone at anybody, and above all not at poor women who have been weak and sinful. Is not that so, monsieur?"

The words spoken by the portress made me pardon her cats, and I would willingly have pressed her hand if I had not feared that I should be clawed.

"Madame," said I, "your sentiments do you honor."

"Mercy! I say what I think, that's all. Then the young woman looks so unhappy. Not that she complains at all — oh, no, she's proud in her poverty; but, in the first place, she cannot be contented, because her seducer has entirely abandoned her; at least, so I presume, for nobody ever comes to see her, not even a cat; except mine, that is, who always goes to say good day to her. Then, when she first came into this house she occupied a very modest room on the fifth floor. Well, she has

left her room to take another right up under the roof, where the window is a skylight and there's no chimney. In fact, it can hardly be called a room; it's only a closet. But mercy, it only costs seventy francs to rent it and the room costs nearly double; and when one has nothing to live on but what one works for, and a woman earns so little, and on the point of being a mother too; well, all the same, as I was saying to you, she doesn't complain. She has made her baby's layette. When I go in to say good morning to her, she always shows me something, either a little cap or a little shirt, and says to me, 'Look, that will be for him,' and then she will smile. Poor woman, she only smiles when she speaks of her child."

"But what does this young girl live upon?"

"Oh, she works, she makes underclothing. She sews very well. Then she has a great deal of taste in trimming caps, headaddresses. I am sure that if she had wished she might have kept her first lodging; but she said to herself, 'I am going to be a mother, I must economize that I may put aside some money so as to have some when the child comes.' Then she's making a very nice layette. I am sure she has a dozen little trifles already."

I felt greatly moved by what I had heard. I made her point out the staircase which led to Mignon's, but the portress said to me,—

"Have you come to order some work from this poor woman?"

"Yes, that is my intention."

"This is what I was going to say to you, monsieur. Since she no longer receives visits from her lover, a bearded fellow that I don't think at all good-looking, Madame Landernoy — you know we say madame — well, she has become very shy. One would almost say that she was frightened. She said to me, 'If any gentlemen come to see me, you will have the kindness to say, always, that I am not in, that I have gone out; you will not allow them to come up.' As nobody has come for a very long time, I haven't had to say anything; but now I remember her orders. However, if you are bringing her work, that can't do her any harm."

"Reassure yourself, madame; so far from wishing to do any harm to your interesting tenant, my only desire is to be useful to her if I can."

"In that case go up, quite to the top, as long as you can find any stairs, and then the door is right opposite you. Besides, Madame Landernoy is the only one who is up there during the day. The two other closets belong to the maids of the house, who don't go up until evening to go to bed."

I understood why this young girl did not wish to receive men after the outrage of which she had been the victim, she must have a feeling of aversion against them. She must suspect them all. I should not be very kindly received, then, and what was I going to say? I knew nothing as to that, but all

the same I decided to see Mignonne and to brave even her anger.

I went up the staircase, which, at first rather wide, became very narrow at the fifth story. When I got there, I stopped to get my breath. Before me was a kind of ladder, by which you could reach the attics, which a good many landlords dare to call rooms. I know well that Béranger has said, —

How happy one is in a garret at twenty!

Yes, one may be very happy there in making love, but one must be very unhappy there when love has flown out of the window. I decided to go up, and found myself in a little low passage, narrow and dark. However, I could distinguish a door in front of me; it was there that she lived. My heart beat as if I were going to commit a bad action. Why do we experience more emotion when we are about to do a good action than when we are about to do a bad one? I should like to think at least that the feeling is different. I went up to the door and was about to knock when I heard talking. I listened —

“Yes, you will be well wrapped up in that, dear child. Another little waist, that makes six of them; I don’t wish that you should lack anything, you will be my company, my little society, you will never leave me. I shall no longer be alone then, and I shall be very happy. I can kiss you as much as I like every day, for I shall nurse you. There

are some people who seem to pity me because I am about to be a mother. Ah, they don't understand all the joys and all the hopes that are comprehended in that title; but for my child, I should be dead. Oh, yes, I should have wanted to die. If it's a girl I shall call her Marie, my mother was called by that name. If it's a boy, I don't know yet. Edouard is nice; or better still, Léon; but never Ernest; oh, that fearful name!"

These last words were pronounced in a changed voice, then I heard nothing further. I rapped softly at the door. Someone exclaimed, —

"Who is there? is it you Madame Potrelle? Wait a minute, I'll come and open the door."

She opened the door, it was indeed Mignonne, just as she had been pictured to us. She was a little girl with fair hair and white skin, with soft and tender blue eyes, but the mouth was no longer rosy; the skin no longer had any color. Sorrow and watching had made the young face pale and thin, and given it an expression of sadness which had become habitual. Mignonne stood as if petrified with astonishment at the sight of me. I had taken off my hat and bowed respectfully to her. I wanted to inspire her with confidence, but as I did not know what to say to her, and as she herself seemed to wait for me to speak, we remained thus for some minutes, looking at each other without saying anything.

"Monsieur, you are mistaken, of course," stam-



mered Mignonne at length in a trembling voice. "You did not mean to come here, you have come up too high."

"No, mademoi — no, madame, I don't think I am mistaken, I want to see Madame Landernoy, is not that you?"

"Yes, monsieur, that is me, what do you want of me then?"

Mignonne had said this in a short, dry tone which proved to me that my visit was not agreeable to her. Perhaps this was to hide from me the gloomy hole in which she lived. In fact, what I saw made my heart bleed, for without going in I could easily see the whole of the lodging. It was a small room, longer than it was wide, receiving light only from the roof, and this single window was too high for anyone to reach it unless with a bar of iron which hung from it, and by which one could open or close it, so there was no view but that of the sky when one raised one's eyes and looked through the window. In this room there was no fireplace and only a small heater; a bed, a commode, a table, a sideboard, a water filter and six chairs were the household belongings of the young girl from Sceaux, but everything was well arranged and kept in the nicest order. No doubt, in making my inspection of the room I had forgotten to answer the question which had been addressed to me, for Mignonne repeated to me in a more imperative tone, —

"I asked you what you want of me, monsieur, for I do not know you."

"Ah, excuse me, madame, I came to beg you — they told me that you were a very fine sewer on linen and I wanted — I had some work I wanted to give you. If, that is to say, you wish to undertake it."

"Who told you that I sewed on underclothing, monsieur?"

"Why, a lady for whom you've worked."

"What was the name of this lady?"

I was very much embarrassed, I stammered, I thought, and at length I answered, —

"By Jove! I don't remember, that is to say, the lady told another lady, one of her friends, who told it to me, because she knew that I wanted some shirts made. Don't you make men's shirts?"

"I am not very skilful, monsieur, and people must not be difficult to please."

"Oh, I am not difficult at all, madame, they are shirts for country wear. If you have the most simple pattern to show me."

I took a few steps forward. Mignonne allowed me to enter her room; she seemed to have got rid of her suspicions. I was secretly rejoiced at this; and while she was searching in the drawer of her commode, I sat down, saying, —

"Excuse me, madame, for taking a seat, but I came up quickly and the stairs are rather steep."

"Pray rest yourself, monsieur, I ought to have

offered you one; but my room is such a poor place that I never think of doing the honors of it. Good heavens, I can't find a single pattern. I remember now, that I sent home the day before yesterday the last dozen shirts I had to make; but of course you brought me a sample?"

"No, I did not think of it."

"It is indispensable, however."

"Then I will bring you one."

"If you will kindly send it to the lady who gave you my address, with the cloth you have bought, I will go there and get it all together; for I don't suppose you will bring me the packet yourself."

She wanted to know who had given me her address. In my eagerness to inspire confidence I exclaimed, —

"By Jove! I thought you would kindly undertake to buy the linen — or percale, or the Scotch batiste for me. I should hardly know how to do it myself, ladies are better buyers than we men. I can easily bring you a sample. I can roll that up and carry it in my pocket and you will not have to put yourself out; and, in your position, madame, everyone ought to avoid giving you trouble."

"Why, monsieur, if I go out to buy the cloth it will hurt me no more to go to the lady's, and I shall take the opportunity of thanking her at the same time for having so kindly recommended me."

"Oh, that was quite natural. She knew that you could — that you had a special claim on her interest.

She said to me, 'Mademoiselle Mignonne, that is to say Madame Landernoy, deserves your entire confidence and I recommend her to you.'

When I mentioned the name Mignonne, she rose suddenly from her seat; her brow became gloomy, her eyes were lowered; a nervous trembling seized her and she murmured,—

"Who told you, monsieur, that I was called Mignonne? The ladies for whom I have worked up to this only know me under the name of Landernoy."

"By Jove! madame, I don't remember. Someone must have told me, however. No doubt the lady chanced to know it."

Mignonne slightly shrugged her shoulders, the meaning of which action was not very flattering to me. It was true that I had become confused and did not know what I was saying. I perceived that I had made a huge blunder in calling her Mignonne.

Probably everyone did not know her first name; and because I knew it she possibly thought I was a friend of that man who had deceived her so shamefully; she might even imagine it was Fouvenard who had sent me to her. That thought threw me into despair. I had made a nice mess of it, by Jove! How could I regain her confidence?

I took two hundred francs from my pocket and offered them to her, saying,—

"Madame, this is for the purchase of the cloth—if you will kindly undertake it. If it is not sufficient, will you please let me know?"

Mignonne waved aside the money I offered her, saying in a severe tone,—

“It is useless for you to give me the money, monsieur; I am not in the habit of making purchases myself. And besides, just at this time I could not undertake the work you offer me. I have no time to do it—I have some that is more pressing.”

I sadly put the money back into my pocket and murmured,—

“Why, madame, I am in no hurry for these shirts. You can make them whenever you like.”

“No, monsieur, I only accept work when I have time to do it. Good-by, monsieur.”

She had opened the door wide; she held it back and seemed to be inviting me to go. She had dismissed me and was anxious to have me gone. I resolved to go, to stay at this moment would only be to irritate her further. I rose, I bowed low, but I paused at the door to say to her,—

“I venture to hope, madame, that on some future occasion I shall be more fortunate and that you will then consent to work for me.”

“Yes, monsieur, some other time,” and she shut her door almost in my face. I was furious with myself. Had I not called her Mignonne she would have undertaken the work I had offered her. Now she viewed me with suspicion, with horror perhaps, for she thought me a friend of Fouvenard, and she remembered how his friends had conducted themselves towards her, and why he had sent them to her.

I ventured to wager that hereafter she would forbid the portress to let me go up to her room. I guessed that from the manner in which she had answered me, "Yes, monsieur some other time."

So here I was, sent away, ordered to the door by this young girl, to whom I had gone with the purest, most kindly intentions. To be useful to her, to solace her, to avenge if possible the wrongs she had sustained, that was why I had gone to her—and although she was pretty, never, even after I could judge of her beauty, had any other thought arisen in my mind—it seemed to me that Mignonne could never be anything to me but a friend, a sister. But I determined to be useful to her, and when I have resolved on anything, no obstacles can daunt me.

I went rapidly down the stairs, and passed by the portress and her cats without stopping. I walked very quickly until I met a cab; then I got into it, and had myself driven to a shop where they sold linens and batistes and all kinds of materials for shirts. I bought the first thing they offered me, I thought it was Scotch batiste. I took enough of it to make a dozen shirts. I got into the cab again and was driven home, for I remembered that I must have a sample. I got a shirt of the simplest fashion and was about to start—but if, as I feared, she would not see me again I would write to her a few lines, only to regain her confidence, and sign it; when a man is not afraid of signing his name it is usually a proof that he has no mischievous designs.

I placed myself at my desk and wrote, —

MADAME, — Although you have refused the work that I have offered you, I venture to send it to you. You can do it in your spare time, and you must not put yourself out in the slightest degree. If I was so unfortunate as to inspire you with suspicion, if you do not wish to see me, in fact, you can give the work when done to your portress, as well as the bill of what I owe you, and I will pay you through her. But believe me, madame, the interest you must inspire in all honest men alone drew me to you, and that the object which caused me to act was such as I can confess openly.

CHARLES ROCHEBRUNE.

I sealed the letter; I got into my cab, and had myself driven back to Madame Landernoy's. These errands had taken time. When I stopped again in front of Mignonner's dwelling it was nearly two hours later than when I had left it. I went straight to the portress, holding my parcel of cloth under my arm. Before I had pronounced the young girl's name, the portress cried, —

"She is not in, monsieur, the young lady has gone out, you cannot go up. Besides, she does not want anyone to go up to her room—she scolded me because I let you go."

"I suspected you would have received this order, madame, and I do not insist on seeing Madame Landernoy; but here is a letter for her, and a package, which I beg you will kindly give her."

"A package—but I don't know whether I ought to take charge of it."

"You can't refuse to receive it, madame. Besides,

I repeat to you that my intentions are honest, and the young woman is very wrong to mistrust me. I hope that later on she will render me justice. I shall be back here in a fortnight."

As I said these words, I threw the parcel and the note on to the portress' knees, at the risk of crushing one of her cats, and departed without listening to her mutterings.

CHAPTER VIII

MADAME SORDEVILLE AND HER PARTY. THE BARON DE BRUNZBRACK

HAVING done all that I could, all that it was at this time possible for me to do for Mignonne, I felt more content with myself. Now, I could forget the young woman for some time, and think only of my love affair. I would go on Tuesday to M. Sordeville's; I must wait until then to see the charming Armantine again. It was four days off, and that would seem long to me. There are men who kill time and shorten an absence by talking of her they love to their friends, but I had never had confidants. A real love is always safer in the depths of one's heart than in the memory of indifferent people, to whom it is not of the slightest interest or who remember it only to rally us or to deceive us; who think us ridiculous if we are constant or envy us if we are fortunate. Besides, are there any such things as friends? As for me, I don't know that I have any. In the beginning of my life I believed in the friendship of some young men whom I often met on pleasurable terms; then, full of confidence, I asked nothing better than to unbosom myself, than to devote myself sincerely to those who pressed my hand.

I was very ill-recompensed for my frankness, my good-humor. I was only too quickly disillusioned, and I withdrew from the society of men to devote myself to that of women; I have not repented of it, for as friends women are infinitely better than men.

I don't call those people friends whom I meet by chance at some gathering, some party of pleasure which brings us together, like Balloquet and Dupréval — they are acquaintances, and that is all.

Tuesday came, and I went to M. Sordeville's; he lived in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, a fine house, fine staircase, fine apartment, a manservant to announce the guests; together with all those things which indicate opulence and comfort. I went into a very large drawing-room, in which there were already a great many guests, and passed rapidly through the midst of people with whom I was not acquainted. M. Sordeville left a group of men with whom he was talking to come to me and press my hand, as if we were old friends. I cannot help laughing myself at the prodigiously lavish way in which people shake hands in society, especially among those who, like myself and M. Sordeville, are acquainted very little and who often do not like each other at all. That is a pity. It would be so good to feel one's hand pressed if that were a real assurance of devotion and friendship, but men have spoiled everything, and the best things, the most intimate expressions, mean nothing, because of the way in which they have been abused.

Monsieur Sordeville, still pressing my hand and holding it, led me to his wife and said, —

“My dearest, here is M. Rochebrune, who has very kindly responded to our invitation.”

The charming Armantine had on a ravishing gown which she wore with infinite grace and coquetry. I did not find in her the abandon of the dancer at Mademoiselle Guillardin’s wedding. Today, she was a fashionable woman, a little affected, and rather ceremonious, still, she was a very seductive woman. Besides, it was quite natural that the lady should not be as unrestrained in her own house as she was at the wedding ball.

In receiving her guests, it was no doubt more suitable for her to maintain this stately manner. The mistress of a house is not the same as a person who is at a party and has no position to uphold.

I thought it a pity; she was so pleasant at the ball. She laughed so easily, she seemed to invite you to laugh with her. As for that, she did the honors of her drawing-room perfectly. She welcomed me with a gracious smile, and thanked me as her husband had done for having accepted their invitation. I don’t know what I answered, my eyes must have said more than my mouth. I should have liked to surprise in her a glance which would have told me at least that she understood me and divined my feeling, but I saw only that gracious expression with which she received the homage of all the men who greeted her.

It is always rather embarrassing for a person at a house to which he has come for the first time, and where he does not see a face that he knows. I left Madame Sordeville, before whom I could not remain in contemplation, for that would have made me look like an idiot and would not have helped matters along at all. With women whom one wishes to please, a man must be careful, of all things, to avoid looking stupid, although in truth that does not always depend on himself. I looked about for Madame Dauberny. I had flattered myself that I should find the lady who appeared so intimately connected with Madame Sordeville at this party, but I did not see her. The men were in a large majority at M. Sordeville's. I asked myself why the women were so scarce, and why I saw so few pretty ones. Was it calculation on the part of the mistress of the house? She was pretty enough not to fear any rivalry, however. All these people were talking in groups in different corners of the drawing-room. There was a piano there but, up to the present, I saw no sign of any music. I passed into another room where two games of whist were established. Here there were fewer people. If she came there, I could talk more freely with her; but she was too much occupied in receiving her company and in listening to the compliments they addressed to her. I thought the lady very coquettish. It has often been said that all women are so. The desire to please is so natural. But are not men

coquettes also? They all want to shine. The one who is ugly wants to please by his wit. This one by his luxury, that one by his generosity, the other by his attention, his servility, his flattery, but the end is always the same. We must not, therefore, blame the women for being coquettish. Nature, in according them beauty, grace, everything that is pleasing, seems to have pointed out to them the use they could make of all these advantages. What I do not like is a capricious woman. Is there anything more unbearable than to see anyone pout, to receive a cold welcome without knowing why, without having done anything to deserve it? I had no right to complain of Madame Sordeville; however, after the friendly way in which she had treated me at the wedding, after the kind of intimacy which my confidence had immediately established between us, I had flattered myself that she would receive me with less ceremony. I should see later on.

Monsieur Sordeville came to me, and asked me if I liked whist.

“I like all games.”

An old gentleman, who closed his eyes when he spoke, as if he wanted to go to sleep, came and joined us. I don't know what he said, for at this moment the charming Armantine came into the room where we were, and I followed her with my eyes. A handsome, fair young man was walking behind her and speaking to her in a low tone, so it seemed to me at least; the pretty woman was laughing heartily, and

making little grimaces calculated to force a regiment to lay down its arms. I was vexed; I was wrong perhaps, but I was not pleased that the lady should listen thus to her companion. I had a great desire to go and mingle in their conversation, but I could not do that. The gentleman who spoke with his eyes shut was saying things to me which must have been very interesting from the way in which he weighed his slightest syllables.

Good God! what tiresome people there are in the world; but among the different species, the most unbearable, in my opinion, are those whose discourse is never ended, and who buttonhole you to tell you story after story, one leading to the other like the tales in the "Thousand and One Nights." They are capable of keeping their auditor in a corner of the drawing-room for the whole evening, never allowing him the slightest opportunity to escape unless he bravely determines to abandon them.

I returned to the drawing-room and approached the mistress of the house. I was desirous of saying something amiable to her, but did not know how to open the conversation. I ended by asking her if she were going to sing.

"No, I don't sing, but I can accompany others if I am needed."

"You play the piano?"

"Yes, monsieur, and you?"

"A little."

"Do you sing?"

"I only sing at home, when I am quite alone."

"Ha, ha! that is egotism."

"Say, rather, prudence."

"And would you not be willing this evening to depart from your custom and sing in company?"

"Oh, no, I should not dare to do that before you."

"Why is that? Do I make you frightened?"

"Oh, no, you make me anything but that."

She smiled as she had done at the ball. She was very pleasing at that moment; but someone came up to speak to her and I was again separated from her. Somebody was going to sing, and we had to be silent. I went and sat down behind two ladies so intensely ugly that they certainly could not afford me the slightest distraction. It was a gentleman who was going to sing, a big young man, very strong and very square in the shoulders, and who stood like M. Kellar when he played Hercules. I heard a voice which made the windows vibrate and our ears ring. We could not have expected anything else from such a Colossus; in fact, everybody trembled at the first notes. What an organ! I don't know that it could be called a voice. I thought it rather resembled the bellowing of a bull, but there were some persons who thought it magnificent. The gentleman sang an air from "Robert the Devil"; the two ladies who were in front of me uttered "oh's!" and "ah's!" which made me think that they were of my opinion, and that the

singing grated on their ears, the more so that, not content with stunning us all, this rude singer was nearly always murdering tune. He sang false notes with imperturbable assurance. There were some moments when he sang so loud that I asked myself whether the people who were passing in the street would not think that a crime was being committed in the house.

Finally, the gentleman had finished. The two ladies turned towards me smiling, and I could not help saying to them, "I should prefer an orchestra with four drums. I don't know whether I have any ears left, I think they must be split!"

I had hardly finished these words when the enormous singer crossed the drawing-room and stopped exactly in front of the two ladies, saying to them, —

"I wasn't in good voice this evening. It seemed to me that I couldn't get the notes out. What do you think, mother?"

"Why, indeed, my dear, I assure you, you sang very well indeed."

"Yes, brother, yes, you sang very well and produced a great effect. You can rely upon what we say, for you know that we understand what we are talking about. There are some people who pretend to be able to judge, and who understand nothing at all about music. So much the worse for them. You sang with perfect taste. I'm sure that you made a good many people envy you."

I had put my foot in it ; it was the mother and sister of the singer who were in front of me. The “oh’s!” and the “ah’s!” which had escaped them were marks of admiration — and I had told them that I would rather hear drums! A new proof that it is necessary to take great care what one says when one does not know to whom one is talking. I perceived that the singer’s sister was darting furious glances at me, so I took myself off to the other end of the drawing-room, having made enemies, and resolving that another time I would be more prudent.

After this gentleman’s howling we needed something soft to restore our auditory nerves. A lady was at the piano and sang a fine piece with runs and trills. How unfortunate to have the idea of singing in society, when one possesses only a thin, harsh voice; but this time I did not allow myself to say anything or to show my opinion in any way. A young man behind me was less careful, he murmured, —

“One might call that singing with a lemon on the key. If it were to go on thus, it would not be for music that I should come to M. Sordeville’s.”

But the mistress of the house indemnified us by executing very brilliantly a piece with variations, which had the merit of not being too long. Then the fair young man I had seen with Armantine sang some ballads ; he had a nice voice and sang

with taste. This vexed me again, for I was persuaded that he was paying court to the lady, but I render him justice, he sang well.

While they were playing a piece for the piano and violin, I passed into the other room. I confess I was rather bored. The mistress of the house was so surrounded with courtiers and admirers that there was no talking with her for a moment; besides, she did not try to furnish any opportunity. Ah, what a difference from the night of the wedding ball; there were moments when I imagined that it was not the same woman. I sat down to a baccarat table, where they were just forming a game. I was pleased enough to play. I've always thought that cards were the best thing ever invented to afford occupation to men of the world. I had been playing for some time, when I turned around, and perceived Madame Frédérique. Never had meeting been more agreeable. She smiled at me and said, —

“Good evening, are you in luck?”

“Not just now.”

“Will you associate me with you in your game? I shall bring you good luck.”

“Willingly.”

“Wait, here is my stake.”

She threw me a purse filled with napoleons and went off without even giving me time to ask her what she wanted me to play. What a strange woman; but at least I had found her the same as

she had been the other evening. In this she was not like her friend.

It seemed, indeed, that my association brought me good fortune, for the luck turned and I won. I looked around for my associate to ask her if she wished to continue, but I could not see her. I continued to play and I won again; I dared not leave, but the serving of tea caused the game to be suspended and a few steps from me I perceived M. Archibald, M. Guillardin's son. I bowed to the gentleman; he bowed also, but coldly, like one who did not care to renew the acquaintance. He need not have been uneasy, I was not at all anxious to become intimate with him, I remembered the manner in which he had looked at me at his sister's wedding. I believed that he was in love with Madame Dauberny, and that he thought me a rival. What false conjectures people make in society!

Really, I was not very greatly entertained in this house. Madame Sordeville laughed with everybody except with me. I was quite mistaken the other evening when I thought that she had looked on me kindly, that she felt something for me. Oh, the women, do they ever know what to expect from themselves? I was very anxious to be gone, but first of all I had to render an account to my associate, and Madame Dauberny was at this moment in conversation with a gentleman adorned with a fine red mustache, beneath which hung a

beard of the same color. The gentleman spoke fervently, even gesticulated with his words. I was greatly mistaken if at that moment he was not making a declaration of love to Madame Frédérique.

You are going to say that I see love intrigues everywhere, that is because, generally speaking, they are the most common things in the world, and if we see a great many of them, rest assured that there are a great many more that we do not see. Madame Frédérique listened to this gentleman as if he were reciting "Télémaque." I would wait until they had done. I went and seated myself in a corner of the drawing-room, where I appeared to be listening to a gentleman who had been playing the piano for a very long time, without anyone being able to guess what he was playing. Fortunately for him, nobody seemed to be paying the slightest attention to him.

In the midst of these people, almost all of them unknown to me, I experienced a void, a sadness at which I was not at all astonished. There was nobody here who was interested in me, why should I be interested in them? I had come there because of a woman who had charmed me, whom I already loved, whom I should have adored; but the cold welcome she had accorded me, and her coquetry, had pressed back, quite to the bottom of my heart, the feeling with which she had inspired me. I was vexed that I had loved her, and did not wish to occupy myself further with her. Balloquet was

more fortunate than I. He never took love seriously, he made an acquaintance as he would have had a coat made. When the coat ceased to please him, he threw it aside, even before it was worn out. He was right, that is the way to be always well dressed. But I have ever entertained a deep feeling for the women who have been my mistresses. I'm not speaking now of those whom I had known for a few days only. I don't call those mistresses. You find it difficult to believe that a man really loves when he confesses that he has had several mistresses at the same time; but have you studied the human heart well? Nature has many strange tricks and secrets which we can never know.

It is probable that my reflections gave no appearance of cheerfulness to my face. They absorbed me so that I did not see Frédérique, who stopped in front of me, and said in a tone of raillery, —

“Good heavens, you look as if you were amusing yourself, M. Rochebrune!”

“Oh, no; but for you I should have gone long ago. We have won twenty-eight napoleons. I have put your share in your purse, here it is, madame.”

“That's very good indeed, you see I brought you good luck.”

“Yes, but that is the only good luck I have had this evening.”

“I understand, poor fellow, people haven't been to him all that he hoped —”

I contented myself with a slight movement of the head. Frédérique resumed, —

“I have a great desire to distract you a little. Will you come and have supper with me?”

I looked up at Madame Dauberny; she divined that I took what she had proposed to me as a joke, for she added immediately, —

“What do you see so extraordinary about that? I have the supper habit; I invite you, and if you accept I shall then invite another gentleman who has just made me the most amusing declaration of love; but he’s a Prussian and doesn’t understand our language very well.”

“Is it that gentleman with the red mustache?”

“Exactly, the Baron de Brunzbrack. There’s a name for you. I’ve turned this gentleman’s head, but I assure you that I did not try to do so. Come, decide, will you accept?”

“With great pleasure; but it seemed to me that the other night, when I had the good fortune to make your acquaintance, you refused to allow me to come and see you.”

“Quite possible; that was because I then imagined for a moment that you wanted to make love to me. I was foolish. You are only in love with Armantine, and as you have noticed this evening that a good many others beside yourself are in love with her it makes you sad, gloomy, despairing. Ha, ha, ha! have I guessed right? Come, monsieur, give me your hand. In taking you away

I shall serve your love more truly than you will do with your languishing airs. All women are jealous of their conquests, and Armantine will believe that I want to take away hers. You'll cause a rupture between us, but that will be only a cloud which the slightest breeze will disperse."

The hope of causing Madame Sordeville some vexation rendered me radiant. I joyfully took the hand that was offered me. Already a great part of the company had gone. Madame Dauberny said two words to her Prussian baron, who was standing as straight as a picket in the middle of the room. The two words produced a magical effect. M. de Brunzbrack jumped backwards and trod on the toes of the gentleman who always kept his eyes closed when he spoke. This time, however, he opened them very wide, exclaiming,—

"Ah, monsieur, you've crippled me! for what do you take me?"

Monsieur de Brunzbrack overwhelmed him with apologies, but at this moment he felt so joyful at the invitation that Madame Dauberny had given him that in addressing excuses to the personage whose feet he had crushed, he stepped on the gown of a lady who was beside him, then upset a chair and, in trying to pick it up, got the buttons of his coat caught in the lace of a lady's mantle, which she had just put on before leaving. The poor Prussian lost his head, he did not know where he was, and dared neither advance nor retire,

Frédérique got him out of this predicament by taking his arm and leading him quickly away, saying to him, —

“Why, do come along, Baron, we are waiting for you.”

The three of us left the drawing-room together. I glanced at Madame Sordeville; she seemed quite distressed at seeing me leave with Madame Dauberny, who, pushing the baron before her, had already taken my arm with the greatest familiarity. I experienced a feeling of joy and contentment which indemnified me for the manner in which I had been bored during the whole evening. Frédérique was right; in taking me away with her she had better served my love than had all the burning glances I had addressed to the charming Arman-tine. Women are never mistaken as to what must be done to accomplish an object.

The baron's carriage, which was at the door, took us in a short time to Madame Dauberny's, on the Boulevard Montmartre. During the drive we spoke little. The baron was still quite bewildered by the awkwardnesses he had committed and the joy he experienced in being invited to supper at the fair Frédérique's; then I think my presence embarrassed him. He did not know on what footing I was with the lady, but he saw that I also was going to sup with her, and I think that caused his preoccupation. Our original hostess seemed to be reflecting also; and I thought of the glance that

Madame Sordeville had cast at me when I was leaving. But when we reached her residence Madame Dauberny resumed her joyous mood and thought only of doing the honors of her house, where I was quite sure that we should not meet her husband. I was persuaded in advance that he was never at these little suppers.

"Three covers," said Frédérique to a manservant who was in the antechamber, "and above all, a good fire, for one can't eat when one is cold. Is there a fire in the drawing-room?"

"No, madame; but there is one in your room."

"Oh, well, gentlemen, let us go into my room then. You will kindly allow me to receive you in my bedroom, will you not? At one o'clock in the morning one can well dispense with a little etiquette."

"Ah, madame," said I, bowing, "it is a favor for which we must thank you."

"Ah, matame," said the baron, in his turn bowing low, "it would always be very jolly in any room mit you."

Without listening to our thanks, Madame Dauberny had passed on before us. A chambermaid lighted us. We went into the bedroom of the person whom M. Archibald had called a jolly good sort. It was a charming retreat, furnished and upholstered with exquisite taste. An alabaster globe suspended from the ceiling threw a soft light on everything. Flowers in profusion, in handsome Chinese vases,

shed an intoxicating perfume. It was the bedroom of a fashionable woman, nothing there indicated the jolly good sort. I expected to find there foils, pipes and statuettes; I saw only flowers, and breathed only perfume. Hardly were we introduced into this room when Frédérique left us, saying graciously, —

“Gentlemen, I ask your permission to go and make myself a little comfortable.”

I remained alone with this Prussian baron and examined him more at leisure; while he looked admiringly at the bed which was at the end of the room. M. de Brunzbrack must have been a man of about forty. He was tall, strong, well built. He must have been a man of much the same stature as those from whom Frederick the Great recruited a regiment of grenadiers. The baron was a rather vivid blond. However, his thick brush of hair was not so red as his mustache. He had big, prominent blue eyes, which he always kept wide open, and which were not very intelligent. However, on the other hand, they were frank, and expressed a sort of good fellowship, though that quickly gave place to anger if anyone seemed to be making fun of him. To sum up, M. Brunzbrack had what is known as a good face. He laughed very easily, and then he opened an enormous mouth, but he so quickly resumed his serious expression that one was quite surprised at having heard him laugh. Then, as this gentleman spoke French with difficulty, he thought fit to accompany his words with

a pantomime which he no doubt thought very expressive, but which was often more grotesque than intelligible. I do not know whether this gentleman also gave himself the trouble of taking my portrait; but I perceived that from time to time he glanced at me furtively. I tried to enter into conversation,—

“This chamber is decorated in delightful taste.”

“Oh, yes. The room is very nice indeed.”

“This whatnot is crowded with curious and well-chosen objects.”

“Yes, quite a lot of little playthings—for the children.”

“But the ladies like them also.”

“Oh, yes, the ladies are children where playthings are concerned.”

“But I don’t think that Madame Dauberny has any children.”

“Oh, yes, the whatnot is quite full and so is the mantelpiece.”

I did not understand this gentleman, I looked at the flowers in the vases, saying,—

“There is nothing prettier than flowers. What a pity that they are poisonous in an apartment.”

The baron opened his eyes still wider and looked around the room. Then he answered,—

“What do you mean by poison in the apartment?”

Fortunately, Madame Dauberny’s return put an end to this conversation, which I found rather tire-

some. When we saw Frédérique, an exclamation of admiration escaped both the baron and me. The lady had put on an ample dressing-gown of blue cashmere, which was confined around her waist by a belt of orange silk. This gown, which was closed up to the neck, allowed us to see a little white silk cravat, negligently tied. Her feet were encased in orange slippers, embroidered with small steel beads. Finally, on her hair, which she had hastily caught up, and which formed a band on one side and on the other long ringlets, she had placed a blue velvet toque adorned with an immense silver tassel, which hung on the same side as the ringlets and seemed to add distinction to them. You would not believe how much charm this negligée gave to the one who wore it. Madame Dauberny's pretty figure showed so well under the folds of cashmere, and her peculiar headdress gave so much expression to her face, that the baron and I were quite charmed, and could not refrain from admiring her.

"Here I am," said Frédérique, smiling at us. "You see I venture to sup in a dressing-gown."

"It becomes you so well," murmured the baron, who as he spoke passed his right hand over his face and threw kisses towards the ceiling.

"All right, all right, my dear baron, I've already told you that I understand you without pantomime, therefore dispense with all the gestures that you can. Let us warm ourselves, messieurs, while awaiting the supper."

So saying, Frédérique placed herself on a large sofa which was beside the fireplace. We took easy chairs and seated ourselves opposite her, and there we all three sat, with our feet on the hearthrug.

"Now," said Frédérique, "a few words which will serve as a prologue to my supper. You, Monsieur le Baron de Brunzbrack, I have only known for two months, that is, to meet you in society, but I am aware that you are a gallant man. This evening, you made me a declaration of love in due form. You think, perhaps, that is why I invited you to come to supper with me. It is my duty to deceive you. I do not love you, my dear baron, my heart has never beaten a bit the faster for you. It was to tell you that, and to offer you at the same time a frank friendship instead of love, that I begged you to come to supper with me. I hope that you are content with this manner of acting and that you will prove to me that you are worthy of my friendship."

The baron rolled his eyes in a very singular fashion and made a strange face. He did not know whether to be satisfied or not. He hung down his head, heaved a sigh, and was about to launch into pantomime when Frédérique took his arm, saying to him,—

"Keep quiet and allow me to continue. I now present to you M. Charles Rochebrune. I have only known him for five days, that is a great deal more recent than my acquaintance with you, but I know

whom I receive, and I am as fully acquainted with this gentleman as if we had been brought up together. Well, baron, do you know why I also invited monsieur to come and share our supper? It was because I knew that he did not think of loving me or paying me court, and that his heart was fully occupied with a very pretty woman who has cruelly tormented him this evening but who will no doubt be more amiable another time."

The baron had hardly heard what concerned me when I saw his face beam. The brave German had probably taken me for a rival, and of course a fortunate rival, but as soon as he knew that I was nothing of the sort, and that I was not in love with Madame Dauberny, he turned towards me and extended his hand, exclaiming, —

"Then you are not my rival? Shake hands, we are friends. We understand each other," and M. de Brunzbrack put one of his hands on his chest, shook his head vehemently, and stamped his foot like a horse which is eager to leave its stable. I quickly gave him my hand, which he squeezed so tightly as to hurt me, and again repeated, "We are friends. Matame does not please you, is that it?"

"Don't go so far as that, baron; I beg you to believe that I render justice to the wit, the grace, and the charm of which madame is possessed."

"Oh, enough, enough," cried Frédérique, "you will make him uneasy. Tell him that you are not in love with me and that you never will be."

I do not know why I had a repugnance to say that. I looked at the pretty folds of Frédérique's dressing-gown and I did not answer. Our amiable hostess continued addressing herself to the baron,—

“As to that, my dear M. de Brunzbrack, I was desirous of telling you that monsieur does not love me, that his heart was fully occupied with another, in order that you would not look upon him as a rival; because I saw you looking at M. Rochebrune with your big eyes, which are very wicked when they are not very kind, and because it is more agreeable to me to see union, harmony, established between my guests; but don't think because of this that others do not pay me attentions, and that I love nobody. I have told you that you will never be my lover, you have, therefore, not the smallest authority over me, and when it pleases me, even before you, to let anyone pay me court, remember that you will not have the slightest right to say a word about it. If you forget, there is an end to it; I'll withdraw my friendship, and will not see you again.”

The baron heaved a sigh which reminded me of one of the notes of the big singer I had heard that evening. He struck his forehead, looked up at the ceiling, then took my hand again and shook it as if he wanted to dislocate my shoulder, muttering,—

“Ah, my good friendt, matame is very mischiev-

ous. She does not know what she is saying; but, all the same, we shall have to oblige her. But I shall always love her madly."

"As to that," resumed Frédérique, "you can do as you like, that does not concern me, but I'm quite tranquil as to your future peace of mind. When men see that they must not preserve the slightest hope, they soon cease to love."

"Not the Prussians; on the contrary, the worse they are treated the more constant they are."

"Then so much the worse for the Prussians, they should adopt French fashions. But enough talk of love and of unveiling the secrets of our hearts. You must understand, baron, that this subject of conversation will become monotonous for us all. Supper is the only thing to be thought of now."

"Madame is served," said a footman.

"Bravo! come, messieurs, give me your hands, both of you, I will conduct you; remember, I am in command here, and I must be obeyed."

"Here and everywhere, madame."

"Yes," said the baron, in his turn, "everywhere und elsewhere."

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE SUPPER. BETWEEN THE PIPE AND THE CHAMPAGNE

FRÉDÉRIQUE took us through a narrow passage, at the end of which we went into a small room beautifully carpeted and very warm ; in each embrasure, and between the windows, were boxes of natural flowers. This place was too elegant for a dining-room and not sufficiently so for a boudoir. A table was set there, laden with all those things which enhance the charm of a meal.

“ You are in what I call my Petit Trianon, or my little apartments ; in fact, in the retreat where I receive my friends. I need not tell you that my husband is never admitted here, but I don’t think it was to see him that you came home with me. We are like the sun and the moon ; no one ever sees us together unless there is something that has disturbed the courses of the stars ; as we’ve agreed that we shall each have entire liberty, we live up to the agreement.”

“ Then it is exactly as if you were not married, ha, ha ! ”

“ Oh, it is not quite the same thing ; but come to the table, messieurs.”

We placed ourselves ; naturally Frédérique was between us. The amiable manner in which she acted at once put us at our ease. The baron was radiant, he rolled his eyes around him, and kept repeating, —

“ I like your *Betit Trille-ânon* very much.”

“ Flowers everywhere,” said I, looking at those with which the table was adorned, and at the boxes which surrounded us.

“ Yes, I adore them, I must always have them.”

“ Like attracts like.”

“ Oh, my dear Rochebrune, don’t put me on a diet of compliments, I detest them. I prefer *volnay*. Come, messieurs, are you not going to drink? Would you prefer some *chambertin*? some *pomard*? — you have but to say so.”

“ It would be much better to drink of all three.”

“ Ah! you are right. Long live diversity! That is delightful, is it not, messieurs? ”

“ Why, it is very pleasing—in wines.”

“ It is very pleasing in everything. Come!”

“ I am too polite to deny what you assert.”

“ Well, I declare! Oh, my flowers, do you see how beautiful they are? These roses, these camellias, these jonquils, these cacti ; if I had nothing but roses, would the bouquet be as pretty? ”

“ Decidedly, flowers are your passion.”

“ Yes, I think it is the only one I have had up to the present. Perhaps that is why I have been giddy, flighty.”

"I shouldt like to be a tulip," murmured the baron.

"You have made a bad choice, baron. The tulip has very little charm for me. I care little for flowers which are inodorous."

"Ah, then I shouldt like to be a beony."

"Ha, ha, ha! you're not very fortunate in regard to flowers. Well, messieurs, what did you think of M. Sordeville's party. Was the concert good? I got there very late."

"By Jove! that's lucky for your ears. There was a gentleman and a lady who put us to a severe test. However, a fair young man sang some ballads rather well. Who is that fair young man, by the way? He was talking a good deal with Madame Sordeville."

"Oh, I know whom you mean, that's Mondival; he's pleasing, but he is stupid. He is fatuous, and I detest fatuous men, I prefer ugly and witty ones. I'm not referring to you, messieurs."

The fair Frédérique laughed heartily. The baron thought it his duty to do the same. I said nothing. I was thinking of Armantine. My neighbor, who saw that I remained serious, pushed my knee, exclaiming, —

"Well, you have nothing to say! are you vexed? But no, there was nothing that hit you there."

"I vexed! and why should I be?"

"He doesn't even know what I said, I was sure of it! He thinks of nothing but his Armantine,

You must love her very well ; from the bottom of the heart, as they say."

"Yes ; that is to say, I did love her."

"And that has passed already, because she flirted a little?"

"Why, she took no more notice of me than if I were a stranger."

"But she hasn't known you for so very long. Then, I warn you, she is excessively capricious."

"Oh, I perceived that ; it's a very ugly fault."

"It's rather common in fashionable women. I am not so, but then it is true I am not a fashionable woman. But you are drinking nothing, messeieurs. Look at me, I will give you an example."

Frédérique emptied her glass at a draught. The baron tried to do the same, but he swallowed the wrong way. He rose to cough and to stamp his foot. They brought champagne, malvoisie ; the cheer was excellent ; I began to be more lively. Madame Dauberny's example led me on, and I did honor to the supper. The baron had got over his coughing and sat down again to the table. His cheeks were beginning to turn purple.

"Presently," said Frédérique to us, "I am going to send away the servant ; then we can put our elbows on the table and say as many foolish things as we like."

"Oh, yes, say foolish things, I shall like that, mit our feet on the dable, that will be amusing."

"Not our feet ; that would be going too far."

"Oh, yes, knees."

"Impromptu parties forever! They are always cheerful. I certainly did not think this morning that I should have you gentlemen to supper this evening, or rather tonight; nor did you expect to come to my house."

"We did not guess we should be in such luck."

"Ah, Rochebrune, you are overpowering with your compliments. I should like to think that you say something else to the women you love. There are those, however, who like this kind of conversation; Armantine does not dislike compliments."

"I assure you, madame, that I had no intention of paying you one; but must one, then, no longer say what one thinks? Yes, this supper is very lucky for me. I was sad, and you have rendered me cheerful—I had renounced all hope, you have restored it to me. In fact, I can't tell you how happy I feel now. You like people to say all that they think, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, for I say it myself?"

"Well, you have a headdress which renders me enchanted; if you knew how becoming it was to you. Is not madame's headdress ravishing, baron?"

The baron began by holding out his hand to me; I was absolutely obliged to give him mine, which he began to shake, exclaiming,—

"You're not in love mit her, are you? Didn't you bromise that you would not love pefore supper?"

I could not help laughing at the solicitude of the baron in regard to the state of my heart. The seductive Frédérique shrugged her shoulders, saying impatiently, —

“Why, no, a thousand times no, he is not thinking of me; cannot a man say to a lady that her head-dress is becoming, and that he likes it, without being in love with her? Monsieur le Prussian, if you go back to that chapter, I shall adjourn the sitting.”

“I am dumb.”

“Talk, but talk of something else. Hurrah! here we are, free at last!”

The servant had departed, after serving the desert; Frédérique filled our glasses, then rose and rang the bell, exclaiming, —

“Ah, I was forgetting the nicest part.”

The servant came back again.

“John, bring some pipes, cigars, cigarettes and tobacco.”

The baron almost uttered an oath in the excess of his admiration.

“Devil take it,” said he, “are we going to smoke? Do you permit us to do that?”

“Not only do I permit it, but I shall give the example, which I don’t always do, however; but this evening we are playing a little comedy together, and then I am like Rochebrune, I am satisfied with my supper.”

“Ah, you smoke, madame?”

“Does that surprise you?”

"Nothing surprises me on your part."

"Really, I do not know whether I ought to take that for a compliment. You meant it for one, did you not? One must put the best construction on everything."

"Do you suppose that I could have an idea of criticising you — you who have been and are still so kind to me?"

"Really! you think me kind? Ah, here's what I ordered."

The man placed on a stand, which he drew up to the table, a complete assortment of pipes, cigars and several kinds of tobacco. Each one chose what suited him. I had thought that Frédérique would confine herself to a cigarette, but she took up a very beautiful Turkish pipe and stuffed the bowl with tobacco which came from the same country; then she stretched herself back in her armchair, emptied a cup of malvoisie and smoked like a Mohammedan. The baron clapped his hands.

"Very goodt, very goodt," he cried, "you have every quality that is bleasing."

"Because I smoke? Why, my dear Brunzbrack, a good many people would say that what you call a quality is a fault."

I took a cigar and the baron an ordinary pipe, and then it was who could smoke hardest. M. Brunzbrack, in whom the pipe seemed to cause thirst, frequently emptied his glass and praised the champagne. For my part, I found the malvoisie

delicious, and then I so greatly enjoyed sitting at table near this original woman, who behaved with us precisely as though she were another man.

"Monsieur," said Frédérique, blowing a puff of smoke towards the ceiling, "life has some very agreeable moments."

"I think the present one delightful."

"It sputters a bit; however, id is goodt."

"What, baron, your existence sputters a little?"

"I did not understandt what you were saying, I was speaking of my bibe."

"Oh, that is all right! What a pity it is that there are gloomy days and sad thoughts which seize us."

"Sad thoughts come only when the heart has been deceived."

"Yes, you're right, Rochebrune, that was why you were sad just now, was it not? Handsome Mondival outdistanced you. It was he who was successful this evening. Ha, ha! see how I treat love, and what will you think of me? That I am very flighty, will you not?"

"We should not deserve our present good fortune if we thought that?"

"Oh, yes, as my friendt Rochebrune says, if we thought that—Gonfound id, id's sputtering again!"

"Why don't you change your pipe, baron? It seems to me that you have plenty to choose from."

A thought which had already come into my

mind several times while we were at supper occurred to me again. I don't know whether Frédérique read it in my eyes, but after looking at me for a moment, she said to me, —

"What are you thinking of? Come, speak, it has come to your lips several times and you have restrained your speech. Is it something so wicked that you are afraid to say what it is?"

"No, it's a very natural reflection; but one which I should not permit myself perhaps."

"It seems to me, however, that you do permit it. I don't like people to keep things in, it's more dangerous."

"To your health, matame. To the pleasure I experience in smoking this pipe in your company."

"Thank you, baron, thank you."

"Will you touch glasses with me?"

"Certainly, that's just what I should like."

As she responded to M. de Brunzbrack's toast, Frédérique still kept her gaze on me, and persistently invited me to speak.

"Well, madame," said I, hesitating a little, —

"Why do you still call me madame? I call you simply Rochebrune, don't I?"

"But then what do you wish me to call you?"

"I told you to look upon me as your friend, your comrade. If I were a man, you would say Frédéric, as I say Rochebrune. Call me Frédéric, then."

"I should never dare."

"Why not, since I allow you to do so?"

"Because you don't seem to me at all like a man."

She smiled strangely, took off her little toque and threw it across the room, passed her fingers through her hair, undid that part of it which was plaited and made ringlets of it also, and as she changed her coiffure, resumed, —

"Monsieur Charles Rochebrune, will you not tell me what has been several times on the tip of your tongue?"

"Excuse me, madame, I was thinking—I was surprised at not finding someone else here."

Frédérique compressed her lips and frowned slightly, murmuring, —

"Were you speaking of M. de Saint-Bergame?"

"Yes."

"In fact, three days ago I should not have supped here without him, but we have had a rupture."

"Oh, you got angry with each other?"

"Yes."

"Not for long, of course?"

"I don't know as to that. When a person can be two days without trying to see another, perhaps he can be a week, and when it has gone on for a week there is no reason why it should not go on for a month, and so on. He did something which displeased me, and I told him so. Instead of excusing himself he thought fit to make me a scene,

but he succeeded very ill. He ought to have come the next day, or the same evening, to ask my pardon. He did not do so, and now I think it will be too late. So, my friend — I should like to call you my friend if you will allow me, monsieur — I think I shall get on without Saint-Bergame much better than I had thought."

She said this holding out her hand to me in such a pleasing fashion that I was tempted to fall on her neck and kiss her. I contented myself with taking her hand and carrying it to my lips. She quickly withdrew it, exclaiming, —

"Well, what are you doing now? Does a man kiss his friend's hand? The idea! that is something quite new."

The baron, although his pipe and the wine had begun to make him heavy, and though his eyes were not so wide open as at the beginning of supper, perceived that I was about to kiss Madame Dauberny's hand. Immediately he took his pipe from his mouth and looked me full in the face, exclaiming, —

"My goodt friendt, is id quite true that you are not at all in love with matame? I say not at all, at all?"

"What has taken you now, baron," said Frédérique, laughing, "are you going to begin again?"

"No, but why does my goodt friendt Rochebrune kiss your handt? I saw him kissing your handt blainly."

"I did not hide it, baron, and I ask nothing better than to begin again."

"Well, then, I shall also begin again. But I have not begun yet."

"Baron, fill your pipe and let my hand be. Let us talk about Armantine's party. A pretty poor affair, wasn't it?"

"Yes, madame."

"I don't know as to that, but M. Sordeville is a very amiable man, very. He's fond of chatting, he likes the way I talk, he says I speak the language very well."

Frédérique's expression had suddenly changed; her brow had become gloomy, her glance was no longer the same; she looked fixedly at the baron and said, —

"Of what then did you talk with M. Sordeville?"

"We talked of affairs. As I had come to France in the ambassador's suite, he questioned me in regard to politics, the government, and many things of a serious character. He is a man of great depth; his opinion was always the same as mine."

Frédérique remained thoughtful, after a moment she resumed, —

"Is this the second time only that you have been at M. Sordeville's?"

"Yes, it is the second time. I first met the gentleman at Madame de Granvallon's, where I had the pleasure of seeing you."

“And you did not know M. Sordeville previously to that?”

“Not at all; but we became acquainted easily; he was very friendly and so was his wife, who, so he toldt me, is a very great friendt of yours.”

“In fact, Armantine was at boarding-school with me — we were friends. I left the school long before she did, I was unwilling to learn anything but the use of weapons and to ride on horseback, which was precisely what they did not teach at my boarding-school. I should have loved to have entered the *École Polytechnique* and afterwards gone to *Saint-Cyr* — become an officer in fact. I quoted to my parents the example of the *Chevalier d'Éon*, who, although a woman, was able for a long time to lead the life of a man. But they asserted that I should be risking too much. That is how people always oppose the vocations of their children. I met Armantine again after she married, and we renewed our acquaintance. She is amiable, cheerful, a little capricious, very coquettish, but good at bottom. As to her husband, I think he occupies himself little with his wife — he allows her a great deal of liberty. I don't say she abuses it, but you gentlemen are very gallant, very audacious, and when the husband is never there — well, if anything wrong occurs, it is his fault.”

“What does M. Sordeville do?” said I, addressing *Frédérique*. She was rather long in answering me, then, at length, she said, —

"I thought you were acquainted with him?"

"Only so far as having met him two or three times at a house where they give balls and play cards. He has conversed with me; he is not lacking in wit, he talks well and he has a still rarer talent, that of making others talk. You see in society there are so many people who cut your words off, and who don't understand how people can have anything to do but listen to them. So I talked to M. Sordeville; then I met him again at this wedding — where you were so kind to me, and it was on that occasion that he invited me to come and see him. But I did not venture to ask him his profession. As for that, if he is rich he need not have any."

"It seems he has some fortune; however, he does business at the Bourse, I believe; and this evening were you pleased with him? — was he amiable to you? He received you kindly I don't doubt; but what did you talk about? not his wife, I suppose?"

"No, he was talking on serious subjects with an old gentleman who closed his eyes altogether when speaking. They got to politics, and chatted for quite a long time."

Frédérique was not the same as she had been a few minutes ago. After a rather long silence, during which our amorous Prussian continued to dispel the sorrows of his heart with champagne, I gently pressed my neighbor's arm and whispered,—

"You are no longer with us. Are you tired? Do you wish us to leave you?"

Frédérique raised her head, passed her hand over her forehead and resumed her amiable expression, exclaiming, —

"Oh, you are right, scold me, my friend, I have my moments of revery — I give myself up to thoughts which have no common-sense. I am very culpable, for I should not yield to them when you are with me. But I do not want you to go yet — we are so comfortable together. Are you sleepy?"

"Oh, no, madame."

"'Madame,' again! You try my patience! Take care, if you go on like that, I shall no longer be your comrade."

"Oh, don't say that — Frédérique."

"You call me Frédérique, which is lucky for you. I have had enough trouble to induce you to do so, but I am satisfied."

She rose, she waltzed around the room and turned around the table, then she stepped in front of a glass that was over the mantelpiece and changed her hair again; this time she twisted a red handkerchief over her head, Creole fashion, then she took the baron by the shoulders and shook him quickly, exclaiming, —

"Well, my friend Brunzbrack, you have nothing to say! Are you going to sleep, by chance?"

The baron raised his head and rubbed his eyes, tried to open them very wide, and cried, —

"What! I asleep when I am mit a bretty woman — mit a woman who has turned my heart as well as my head!"

"I don't know whether or not I have turned your head, but it seems to me you were scarcely taking part in the conversation."

"It was the bibe which made me a bit stuid. But I have not seen you pefore mit — why, you have changed your headdress again. Mein Gott, how nice you look mit this new way of dressing your hair! I don't know why you amuse yourself mit putting all these strange tings on your head; wasn't it nice enough as it was?"

"Monsieur de Brunzbrack is right," said I, contemplating Frédérique, to whom the red handkerchief gave a saucy, scampish appearance which changed her entirely. "Do you know, my dear, you are not generous in thus changing your head-dress every moment — and such enticing ones as you think of! Do you want to make this poor baron die of love?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm not afraid of that. I wear a nightcap — is one no longer free to wear a nightcap? But I don't want you to go to sleep, baron. Let us sing; let us be merry! let us clink glasses!"

"Yes, yes, ledt us trink! Ledt us sing!"

"You must begin baron, but no ballads, above all, no doleful complaints. We want something cheerful, jolly even. Why, since we are all men, should we restrain ourselves?"

She replenished our glasses, then threw herself back in her chair and shouted with laughter at the baron, who was gazing at her in so tender a manner that at that moment one could no longer see his eyes, and his face looked like an egg-plant.

"Come, baron, we are waiting for you."

"Oh, must I sing first? I am quite willing. Vaidt till I rememper a bretty song. I know so many. Trum, trum, trum, trideri, tram, tram, tram. I know so many, and yedt strange to say, I can no longer the peginning rememper. Vaidt, tum, tum!"

"I am afraid you will never get any further, my poor Brunzbrack; while waiting for memory to return to you, Rochebrune will sing."

"Me?"

"Yes. Well, what now, have you too lost your memory? Why, what is the matter with the men, their wits are dulled by a glass of champagne or malvoisie?"

"I am quite willing to sing, but the songs I know are so foolish."

"Sing us foolish songs then. I permit anything that is not too broad. Besides, I am sure my friend will sing nothing that's indecorous."

"Why, on the contrary, I am sometimes extremely indecorous."

"Then, monsieur, you may remain silent."

She assumed a rather sulky expression. I hastily hummed something and said to her, —

"It will be only slightly jolly."

“Go on, in that case; I permit you — Vadé, Gallet, Favart. Witty things are never coarse, or they would no longer be witty.”

“I am trying to remember my tune.”

“Good heavens, you are unbearable with your tunes. Wait, here’s one. ‘Tra, la la la la la la la’ — any song will go to that.”

“You are right, it is that of ‘The Apothecary’s Family.’”

“I don’t know of what family it is, but no matter, provided it will do. Begin, monsieur.”

“Here I am. I am going to sing you ‘The Wind.’ Will you allow me?”

“All right; ‘The Wind’ it is.”

“I beg you to believe that it is no question of that which is the word in an enigma in the ‘*Mer-cure Galant!*’”

“I should hope not; it is the wind which breathes across the mountain, the wind of Castibelza.”

“The same! ‘Quand on te propose.’ Ah, that won’t go to the tune of ‘The Apothecary’s Family?’”

“That’s strange, it ought to have gone to it. Try another.”

“I think the tune of ‘Baiser au Porteur’ will do my business.”

“How long you are in beginning, my friend.”

I began, “Quand on t’offre une promenade,” —

“Trum, trum, trum, traderi, dera, troum, troum.”

“Ah, baron, you are going to spoil our pleasure with your ‘troum, troum.’”

"I am still trying to remember my tune."

"You can try to remember it after, but listen to Rochebrune, who is going to sing us a merry song."

"Oh, that's very nice, that is! Now we shall have a good laugh; ho, ho, ho! how amusing it will be! Ha, ha, ha!"

The baron laughed so heartily at the pleasure he anticipated, that Frédérique had some trouble to make him be quiet; at length he ceased and I sang to the tune of "Baisier au Porteur."

Quand on t'offre une promenade,

Lisa prends gare au temps qu'il fait !

S'il fait du vent, dis-toi malade,

Ou bien, l'on en profiterait

Pour te faire ce qu'on voudrait.

Va, je ne ris pas, sur mon âme !

Par ce temps-là je fus prise souvent !

Ma chere, il n'est pour une femme

Rien de plus traître que le vent.

I stopped after the first verse to look at Frédérique. She smiled, which was a good sign. As for the baron, he repeated each verse after me, sometimes making variations and accompanying them with a great laugh.

"Go on," said Frédérique.

I coughed, I drank, and I shouted like Ravel in the "Tourlourou," —

"Second verse, same tune."

Et puis, comment veux-tu qu'on fasse ?

On s'habille quand il fait beau :

Le vent arrive, on s'embarrasse,
 On ne peut tenir de niveau,
 Le bas d'sa robe et son chapeau ;
 On a les yeux pleins de poussière
 Lorsque ça souffle par devant,
 Mais c'est plus perfide, ma chère,
 Quand on n'voit pas venir le vent.

"My dear fellow, oh, oh, oh, goot ! goot ! goot !
 Trou, troum, troum !"

Frédérique laughed outright.

"Third verse, same tune —"

"Oh, he's unbearable with his announcements.
 Why don't you sing?"

Si la pluie est désagréable
 Et sur nous mouille nos jupons,
 Le vent est libertin en diable !
 Il dessin' ce que nous avons —
 Il nous fait comm' des petits cal'çons ;
 Un homme, alors, garde moins de mesure,
 Car ça le monte au ton du sentiment !
 Et ce n'est pas notre figure
 Qu'il regard' tant qu'il fait du vent.

"Ha, ha, ha ! goot ! goot ! goot ! But I don'd
 understandt it !"

"So much the worse for you, baron, but I'm not
 going to give you an explanation. It seems to me it
 is readily comprehensible. It's a little free, but it
 is funny. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"There are only three verses ? That is a pity !"
 Frédérique lifted her glass to her lips, saying, —

"After all, where is the harm? Formerly, men sang more often and they were less wicked than those of today. Poor French gayety, what has become of you? Joyous gatherings of the Caveau! —it was for song alone that people demanded membership in your association."

"Troum! troum! Traderi dera! Ah I can remember my song at last!"

"Come, baron, we are listening to you."

The baron opened an immense mouth, we expected the voice of a stentor to issue from it, but we were agreeably surprised; when he sang, M. de Brunzbrack assumed a little head voice which resembled that of a child of two years, and which greatly reminded me of the one in "L'homme à la poupee."

I who in oder tays hadt the glory
Of singing for fair Mistress Iris,
Mit your leave vill now dell you the story
Of dot young shepherdt, Paris,
Mit a Mirlidon —

Frédérique interrupted the baron, exclaiming,—
"Enough! enough! we know that, my poor Brunzbrack. It wasn't necessary for you to take so much trouble to recall that song."

"What! you know id?"

"Who does not know the 'Judgment of Paris' sung to the tune of 'Mirliton, mirlitaine.' I think it is by Collé. I ought not, perhaps, to confess that I know it. But since I have told you that I was a boy, that should not surprise you."

“It’s very cholly, it always ends mit ‘Mirlidon, mirlidaine, mirlidon, don, don!’”

“Yes; but find something else, baron.”

And Frédérique threw her red handkerchief to the end of the table; rose, ran to the glass again, drew a tiny comb from the pocket of her dressing-gown, and in an instant made an entire change in the arrangement of her head. This time she picked a beautiful white rose, put it in her hair, made still longer ringlets, and made herself look like one of Lawrence’s charming English faces, which have been reproduced in profusion by the engravers, and which no one can look at without saying to himself that the one who possessed the model was fortunate indeed.

What a singular woman was this Madame Daubigny! How far I had been from imagining her as she was. In turn cheerful, laughing almost foolishly; then suddenly serious, almost melancholy, severe even; free in her actions, in her speech; assuming the tone and manners of a man, then suddenly revealing the grace and gentleness of a woman. I did not yet know what judgment to pass upon her, but I had no doubt as to her frankness; I was quite sure that she would never restrain herself from saying all that was in her mind.

“‘Mirlidon, don, don, mirlidaine!’”

It was the baron humming between his teeth. Frédérique had returned to her place at the table. She looked me right in the face and said, —

"Come, comrade, what do you think of this head-dress? But in the first place, let me assure you that there is no coquetry in all this. It amuses me to change my appearance, to look in turn serious, saucy, romantic, heedless. I should have liked to have been an actress, to have changed my part often, I am sometimes as childish as when I was twelve years old — but I repeat to you it is not to please that I do all that, it is to amuse myself."

"Even if you were coquettish, where would be the harm? You have the right to be so."

"I know that well; that is why I do not use it. After all, perhaps I am so without suspecting it. They say no one knows himself. You will not tell me what you think of me?"

"Because I am embarrassed to choose. You were more alluring just now. At present you are dreamy, and that I think is more dangerous."

"And you, baron, what is your opinion on this new headdress?"

Monsieur Brunzbrack had put himself to sleep by humming the refrain of his song, and only answered, —

"'Mirlidon, mirlidon, don, don!'"

"He is in imaginary spaces," said Frédérique, turning towards me. "Let him sleep. As a German, he does not know how to drink; or rather, he drinks too much. That's a nice way to enjoy one's self. It is stupid to get tipsy and go to sleep. I can drink as much champagne as I like, that only makes

me chatty, expansive—doesn't it, my friend? Ah, a single fancy takes me, I must yield to it or I shall stifle."

"What is it, by Jove? Tell me quickly."

"I should like to be on intimately friendly terms with you. Are you willing?"

I can't explain the effect those words "intimately friendly" produced upon me. It passed through my body like a shiver. I felt myself seized, upset! It was of no use for me to say to myself that with *Frédérique* the request meant nothing, that it was merely the result of her originality. I was moved, and I did not know what to answer. She relieved me of the trouble by resuming,—

"That is settled then. I will be your confidant; you shall be mine. As very intimate friends we shall hide nothing one from the other. Shake hands on it. Your name is Charles I think. I shall call you Charles, it is less ceremonious than *Rochebrune*. Come, shake hands; don't you want me to call you so?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I think that will be charming, madame—*Frédérique*."

"Anyone would say that you found it difficult, but to me it seems as though you are my brother and that I have called you Charles all my life,—"

"Oh, it seems to you that I am your brother." I did not feel at all satisfied at her regarding me as her brother. Ah, how fatuous men are! I already imagined that I had turned *Frédérique's* head; and

her words had dispelled my illusion, and I was for a moment silent. I quickly pulled myself together and took her hand, saying, —

“Come, my dearest friend, let us go on with our confidences and questions. Tell me why, just now, a cloud of sadness came over your face as you spoke to me of M. Sordeville. Was it because you fear that he does not make his wife happy?”

Frédérique resumed her serious expression ; she looked even gloomy ; her eyes were lowered towards the ground. She kept silent for a long time. At length she answered me, —

“Your first question is badly chosen. I cannot answer it, my dear Charles ; there are some things which one must shut close in one’s heart, which one must not even confide to a friend—above all when—I was wrong to give way to such ideas. No, it is impossible, it cannot be, I repeat. I should never have had those thoughts which for a moment took away my cheerfulness. It is therefore needless to mention it again.”

“I see but one thing about it, Frédérique, which is that you have a secret that you will not confide to me. You are free to do as you like.”

“It’s my turn now to ask questions, monsieur. They tell me—someone with whom I was talking about you since the wedding, for I have sought a little information since that time—Had I not done so, my dear fellow, believe me, I should not have invited you to supper with me. But a lady in whom

I have confidence, and of whom you were very fond — formerly — that need not surprise you, she loved you just as much — do you know whom I mean? ”

“ Do finish, what did the lady say? ”

“ She told me a great many things about you, which was very good indeed on the part of a mistress whom you had left ; but she expected that, she had had her time, and it seems, besides, that you showed her great consideration and that you are still good friends.”

“ What is her name? ”

“ It isn’t worth while to tell you. This lady, then, was talking to me about you ; I questioned her, for I was glad to get information. You pleased me directly I saw you. I immediately divined that we should one day be good friends. Good friends, you understand, which is much better than being lovers, for it lasts longer.”

“ You see I remained this lady’s friend, however, although she had been my mistress, madame.”

“ That is an exception, why did you say madame? ”

“ Forgive me, I am not yet accustomed to calling you by name. Well, you were saying — ”

“ I make a good many digressions, don’t I? I am a chatterer, I say everything that comes into my head ; but it is so good to disclose one’s thoughts. Come, don’t be impatient, we are in no hurry ; you are very comfortable here ; there’s no woman waiting for you, is there? Let my words follow the will

of my imagination, which sometimes carries me from one subject to another. We must be indulgent to our friends."

As she said this, she passed one of her arms around me and leaned on my shoulder. Her head was quite near my face, and when in talking she raised her eyes and fixed them on me, and our looks met, we were so near to one another that I felt her breath on my face. Oh, this woman must be very cold, very indifferent, to treat me as if I were really her brother or her father, but the champagne had no doubt produced a different effect upon each of us. Frédérique saw in me only a friend to whom she might show herself as she was; while I always saw a pretty woman. Certainly, I had not dreamed of paying her court, but the more she yielded to the originality of her disposition the more seductive I found her, and it seemed to me that she put my friendship to a rough proof when she almost took my chest for a pillow.

"To return to this lady, your former friend, she told me that you had been about to marry some time ago and that the marriage had suddenly been broken off without her learning the cause of the rupture. She asked you what it was, but you would never tell her. She even thought that it was that which was the beginning of your breaking with her."

"That is possible."

"But that which one does not say to a mistress one can well confide to an intimate friend. What

was it that caused your marriage to be broken off? tell me that."

Frédérique's speech suddenly drove my cheerfulness away; a painful remembrance assailed me. I sighed, and was silent.

"Well, you don't answer me," cried Frédérique, after a long silence.

"Because — I am very sorry, my amiable friend, but you have ill-chosen your first question, and I cannot respond to what you ask of me."

"Ha, ha, ha! that is a joke!"

"What makes you laugh?"

"What, have not you noticed that, being two intimate friends, who have sworn to hide nothing one from the other, the very first questions we put reciprocally we cannot, or we will not answer. Look you, my friend, it is nearly always thus with everything that is planned. We will bind ourselves to nothing, that is much wiser — then, come what may —"

" 'Mirlidon! don! don!'"

"Oh, good heavens! I'm afraid — I believe the baron is awake, and to be frank, I would much rather he were asleep."

"He's dreaming that he is singing, that is all."

"Come, dear Charles, I want to impart something in confidence. You think, of course, that my conduct is very singular — very reprehensible, perhaps?"

"I, why should I think that?"

“Let me speak. I know very well that I wound the proprieties, that I arouse prejudice ; that people have a great many things to say about me which are rarely to my advantage—but I care not for that, Listen!”

CHAPTER X

CONFIDENCES. MONSIEUR DAUBERNY

“BARELY twenty-one when they married me, I had loved—or thought I had loved. I was lively, ardent; I am from a country where women do not know how to hide what they feel, where they sometimes meet an avowal half way; and with me, as Rochefoucauld says, ‘The accent of the country is in the heart as well as in the language.’”

“At eighteen, I had taken a great liking to a very handsome young man—at eighteen people think a great deal of physical beauty—that is natural, people appreciate, in the first place, that which they see. My young man had a pink-and-white complexion, fair hair, blue eyes, which were soft and loving in their expression, and was two years older than myself, but looked like a schoolboy of sixteen; awkward, embarrassed, he knew not what to say to me, and contented himself with looking at me; but as his eyes were beautiful, it made me very happy that he should keep them constantly fixed on me. I said to myself, ‘He loves me, he is very much in love with me, since he thus remains in contemplation of my person.’ However, I should have liked to have heard a few words of

love from his mouth. I tried to procure opportunities for him to be alone with me; I thought that then he would declare himself; but Gabriel, for that was his name, did not know how to seize an opportunity. When one came, were I with a friend, I would make a little sign to her to leave me for a moment— young girls understand each other very easily. But when a pretext had been found, Gabriel thought it his duty to take his hat and go with her. You may imagine how vexatious this was to me.

“ One day, however, as Gabriel was going after a vender whom I was dismissing, I held him back by the tail of his coat and he was obliged to remain, which he did, blushing up to his eyes as he said to me, ‘ Have I some white on the back of my coat, mademoiselle?’ ‘ No, monsieur, there is nothing on your coat,’ answered I, ‘ but I desire to talk with you, and that is why I have kept you. It was quite necessary that I should employ this means, since you always escape directly we are alone.’

“ Gabriel lowered his eyes and twirled in his hand a little malacca cane which he habitually carried. I invited him to sit down beside me on the sofa. He did so, keeping as far as possible from me, and continued to keep his eyes lowered, looking first at the tip and then at the head of his cane.

“ ‘ Monsieur Gabriel,’ cried I, at length, impatient that he did not break the silence, ‘ have

you nothing to say to me? Look at me, at least. Up to the present when you were not speaking to me, you had your eyes on me. Why should you then today look constantly at the tip or the head of your cane? Come, monsieur, raise your eyes and confess to me what lies in the depths of your heart; and come nearer, anyone would think that you were afraid of me, that I was scolding you.'

"Gabriel decided at length to look at me, and drew a little nearer. He was as red as a cherry; he looked like a schoolboy who was afraid that his master was going to apply the ferule — but he was a very handsome boy.

" 'Monsieur,' resumed I, 'I see very well that you dare not tell me what you have so often uttered in sighs when with me. However, one cannot come to an understanding without an explanation. As I am not so timid as you are, as I like to know where I stand, I am going to help you to speak, for I believe that I have guessed the secret of your heart. 'You — you are in love with me, are you not, M. Gabriel?'

"My bashful admirer again began to examine his cane, which made me very impatient, then he stammered, —

" 'I — I do not know, mademoiselle.'

" 'What, monsieur, you do not know? However, you must try to know. Don't you think I am pretty?'

" 'Oh, yes, mademoiselle.'

“‘Don’t you experience great pleasure in being with me?’

“‘Yes, mademoiselle.’

“‘Then, monsieur, you see you are in love with me.’

“‘Mercy — that’s quite possible.’

“As he continued the same trifling with his stick, unable to contain myself longer, I snatched it from his hand and threw it across the room, exclaiming, —

“‘Monsieur, while I am speaking to you it seems to me that you might easily dispense with playing thus with your cane; you look as though you were not listening to me, and that is very insulting.’

“The poor fellow was quite petrified by my action; he looked out of the corner of his eye at the stick and murmured, —

“‘I won’t do it again, mademoiselle.’

“Appeased by his air of submission, I said, —

“‘Well, M. Gabriel, since you are in love with me you must wish to marry me, for my parents assert that people should not love unless they wish to marry. I don’t know yet whether that is quite true. Should you like to marry me, M. Gabriel?’

“‘Why, certainly, mademoiselle, if you think it is possible.’

“‘Why should it not be, monsieur? Are not young boys sent into the world to marry young girls?’

“‘ I don’t know, mademoiselle.’

“‘ What, you don’t know? Why, what have they taught you then at your college, monsieur?’

“‘ Latin, Greek, mathematics, geography, mademoiselle.’

“‘ And nothing at all concerning young ladies, love, and marriage?’

“‘ Nothing at all.’

“‘ That’s what they send young men to college for! That’s quite worth while! A queer way of making men of the world! Well, M. Gabriel, you are in love with me, you love me, you wish to marry me. I ask nothing better than to be your wife. Well, then, monsieur, you must go and find my father and ask him for my hand.’

“‘ You want me to go to your papa?’

“‘ Yes, monsieur, and immediately; he is in his study just now. Go and make your offer to him.’

“‘ But, mademoiselle, but — I really believe that I dare not say that to your papa.’

“‘ My papa, my papa. Good heavens! M. Gabriel, can’t you say my father? You speak like a little boy of six. There’s no question of trembling and not daring. If you don’t go and make your offer, someone else will be bolder than you. He will speak, my father will listen to him, we shall be engaged and I shall not be your wife.’

“ Gabriel made a great effort to pull himself together; he glanced over his dress and then exclaimed, —

“ ‘Mademoiselle, I’ll go and speak to your pap — your father.’ ”

“ ‘That is all right, and you will come back and tell me immediately what answer he gives you.’ ”

“ ‘Immediately?’ ”

“ ‘Why, of course; do you think that it will not interest me?’ ”

“ ‘I will come back again, mademoiselle.’ ”

“Gabriel had reached the door of the drawing-room, then he returned to pick up his stick, which had remained in a corner. I stamped my foot with anger as I said to him, —

“ ‘What, monsieur, you came back for that?’ ”

“ ‘Mademoiselle, I did so because I am accustomed to hold it and it serves me as a support. When I don’t have it, I don’t know what to do with my arms.’ ”

“ ‘When one is thinking deeply of anything, monsieur, one is never embarrassed with his arms; but go and come back quickly.’ ”

“Gabriel had gone. I was uneasy, impatient; I imagined that I was deeply in love with this young man. With young girls, the slightest sentiment, the lightest fancy, assumes at first the shape of a passion—an amiable illusion which lasts only too short a time, thanks to you, messieurs, who know how to lead us so easily to the stern reality.”

“My dear Frédérique, illusions and deceptions are common to both sexes. You are perhaps more loving, but you are also more easily deceived. We

change without motive, you change through coquetry. There is no more fidelity on the one side than on the other."

"Do you think so? Well, possibly you are right. Let me finish the story of this first love. Gabriel was not long absent, in ten minutes he came back to me; he was red, his eyes were animated and did not express joy. I must tell you, also, that my father, an old sailor, was not always amiable; that his language was often brusque and that his manners accorded with his language.

" 'Well, monsieur,' said I to Gabriel, 'did you see my father?'

" 'Yes, mademoiselle.'

" 'Did you ask him for my hand?'

" 'Yes, mademoiselle.'

" 'What answer did he give you?'

" Gabriel supported the end of his cane on the floor and twirled it.

" 'Oh, monsieur, if you don't leave your cane alone, I'll throw it out of the window. What did my father say to you?'

" 'Mademoiselle, your father was not very amiable, he listened to me and looked as if he were making fun of me. Then he took me by the hand and led me out of his study, saying to me, —

" ' "You go and wipe your nose, you can come back to me in ten years and talk about your love."'

" 'What, can it be possible my father told you to go and wipe your nose?'

“ ‘Yes, mademoiselle, and I swear to you that there was not the slightest need of my doing so.’

“ ‘I remained petrified, my father’s answer seemed to me so insulting, so humiliating to Gabriel, that I looked at him fixedly and said to him, —

“ ‘And you took it like that?’

“ ‘What would you have had me do, mademoiselle? I could not threaten your papa.’

“ ‘Oh, of course not! Well, M. Gabriel, since people look upon you as a schoolboy, you must prove that you are a man; you must elope with me.’

“ ‘Elope with you?’

“ ‘Gabriel was quite stupefied, but I was not afraid of anything and did not comprehend the importance of the action I wanted to undertake, and I resumed, —

“ ‘My dear M. Gabriel, you look quite stunned. However, it’s very easy; you will abduct me. That is to say, I’ll manage to get out this evening after dinner, they will mistrust nothing, it will be very easy; you’ll wait for me at the corner of the street, wrapped in a cloak. Do you hear? You must have a mantle, no one can elope with a young girl without that, and a big hat pulled down over your eyes. I shall have on a large pelisse and a veil. That will do very nicely. You will take me—wherever you like. Later on you will write to my father that I am with you, then he must consent to our marriage; it always ends like that.’

““In that case, mademoiselle, I am quite willing to elope with you.”

““This evening?”

““This evening.”

““I shall leave the house at eight o’clock. Wait in the neighborhood.”

““I shall be there.”

““And you have a cloak?”

““I have one, mademoiselle; but I have not a broad hat.”

““Buy one.”

““Ah, that’s right, I didn’t think of that.”

““And make all your arrangements as to the place where you will take me.”

““I’ll go and think about it.”

““Go, we shall meet again this evening.”

“I cannot tell you, my dear Charles, all the thoughts that assailed me after I had got my lover to consent to elope with me. I was pleased, and then again I was sorry. I thought it was delightful to elope, for I had read a good many novels, and those, unfortunately, in which one never finds a line of truth; those in which nature, like the language of the personages, is always false, and shows you only characters which never existed, pompous and pretentious speeches, and for morals, vice and crime always triumphant over good faith and virtue. Are not those bad books, my friend? and even when there are style, color and poetry, is not the author even more culpable since he em-

plays his talent only to disgust with what is good, what is right, what has always been respected? As I was telling you, then, I was very much agitated and a prey to a kind of delirium, but since my infancy I had not had a mother. Abandoned early to the care of mercenary people, having found no heart to which I could unfold my own, treated by my father as a little girl, or rather as a boy who was left to play the devil during the whole day, I was entirely unrestrained. Ah, had I only had my mother, how many things I should have escaped! She would have made me steadier, and it is probable that this evening you would not be supping with me.

“I would not draw back; at the time appointed I furtively left the house, wrapped in my pelisse, my head covered with a veil, and holding a light package in which I remember I had put a ball-gown, some bracelets, a cornet of sugared almonds, a toothbrush, three pairs of gloves, two cakes of chocolate, a fan and a shoehorn!

“I found Gabriel awaiting me; the poor fellow was trembling a great deal more than I. He had on the correct cloak, but his head was covered with an immense hat such as market porters wear. It eclipsed him, swallowed him up, and was not at all the kind of headgear that I expected my abductor to wear. Then Gabriel still held in his hand that unfortunate little cane, which had already caused me so much annoyance. He came to me, stam-

mered a few words, I seized him by his arm and said to him, —

“‘Let us hurry, they may follow me, where is the post-chaise?’

“‘The post-chaise! I haven’t one, you didn’t say anything to me about a post-chaise.’

“‘I thought that would go without saying. Where are you going to take me then?’

“‘Oh, don’t be uneasy about that, I have taken a lodging. Come.’

“‘I allowed him to lead me, only I couldn’t help saying to Gabriel, ‘You have a very ugly hat.’

“‘Why, mademoiselle, it’s a hat that comes down over my eyes.’

“‘I can easily see that, but it comes down too far over your eyes. You should have had a hat such as was worn under Louis XIII, with a feather around it. You look like a flour dealer.’

“‘Mercy, you didn’t tell me —’

“‘Good heavens! must I tell you everything!’

“‘My lover took me into a house in the town where they let furnished lodgings. I thought that very unromantic. I had flattered myself that I should be carried to some old château, or to a village inn where there would have been robbers or at least very dark alcoves; instead of that, they took us into a well-lighted room, where the table was laid, but in which nothing indicated that people would pass the night there. I said nothing, but it seemed to me rather singular. Left alone with

me, Gabriel, who had taken off his cloak and his mean hat, began to play with his stick again as he said to me, —

“ ‘Mademoiselle Frédérique, do you like duck with olives?’ ”

“ You cannot imagine the effect which this question produced upon me at a moment when I thought that my lover should throw himself at my feet, and vow undying affection for me.

“ ‘Was it to give me duck with olives that you eloped with me, monsieur?’ said I to Gabriel, highly vexed.

“ ‘No, mademoiselle, but we must have supper; no one can come here without having supper, and we’ll have it while waiting for them to come in search of you.’ ”

“ ‘Till they come in search of me! whom do you mean?’ ”

“ ‘Why, your papa.’ ”

“ ‘My father come to seek me here? And who has told him that I am here?’ ”

“ ‘Why, I did.’ ”

“ ‘You! what, you brought me to this hotel to hide me here, and then you let my father know it.’ ”

“ ‘Why, mademoiselle, it was you who said to me, “You will elope with me, then you will write to my father and he will be obliged to let us marry.” I followed your instructions, I sent a letter by messenger to your papa. I told him that I had eloped with you, that we were here.’ ”

““Oh, is it possible for anyone to be so horribly stupid? Why, monsieur, it is only after some time that they write to the parents. It is only when the elopement has been talked about a good deal, when they have looked for the young girl for a long time. Good heavens! how stupid you are!”

“Gabriel did not know what to say, I was suffocating with anger. At this moment I heard my father’s voice in the street; he was coming into the house with one of his friends, to whom he was saying,—

““It’s a childish joke, but I think it a very bad one.’

“The idea of being found there by my father, the little package I had brought, Gabriel’s stupefied appearance, all transported me with fury; and in the desire I experienced to avenge myself, to vent my anger upon someone, without once pausing for reflection, I snatched the cane from my lover’s hand and applied a dozen strokes to his shoulders without giving him time to recover himself. Then, I opened the window, which was on the ground floor; I did not hesitate, I jumped out. I found myself in the street, without being hurt in the slightest. I ran to our dwelling, managed to slyly enter my chamber, where I quickly smuggled into bed in such a way that when my father came home he believed that the letter he had received was nothing but a lie, and did not even speak to me of it. As for little Gabriel, I never saw him again.

"This, my friend, is the story of my first love — if the imagination of a young girl, which makes her believe that she loves the first pretty fellow who looks at her sighing, can be called love. Some months after this adventure, another young man paid me court, but this one knew how to speak, he was not in the least timid. He was not at all bashful in pouring out his love. He expressed himself only too well, perhaps, for he turned my head with phrases which I thought very fine then, but which now seem to me very empty and insipid. After having declared his passion, he demanded my hand of my father, who formally refused him. This lover had not a sou, and I have learned since that he was a very worthless fellow. But then my father seemed a tyrant to me, and when Anatole proposed to me to elope that he might marry me, the proposition seemed quite natural to me.

"However, I hesitated; the remembrance of my foolish adventure with Gabriel had rather chilled my desire for elopements, so at first I raised a few difficulties. Anatole drew from beneath his waistcoat a little poinard with a glittering blade, swearing that he was going to kill himself before me if I would not consent to elope with him. A man who wished to kill himself for love of me, that was magnificent, there was no resisting it, I consented.

"The elopement was effectuated without difficulty; they guarded me so carelessly. This time I had the pleasure of eloping in a carriage, but we

only went three leagues from town. Anatole stopped at an inn where we were to pass the night. Oh, this time I was running great risks. In the dining-room of the inn, where we had to wait while they were preparing a chamber for us, we met two ladies who were returning to Bordeaux. It seemed to me that I perceived smiles, signs of intelligence pass between them and Anatole. I was mistrustful, but I said nothing. I refused supper and went up into the room they had prepared for me, telling Anatole not to disturb himself, and to sup without me. He agreed to do so, which was rather ungallant. There are some circumstances in which a man should not dream of eating; although I had had little experience, it seemed to me that those were our circumstances.

“After a quarter of an hour, I opened my door very softly and went downstairs without meeting anyone. I reached a passage on to which several doors opened. I heard laughter and recognized Anatole’s voice. I drew near and listened with my ear to the door. I cannot tell you what I felt when I heard the person who had eloped with me call me a little fool, whose head he had found it easy to turn. Two women’s voices mingled with Anatole’s. They were making fun of me, laughing at my expense, then they kissed each other and promised themselves all sorts of diversion with my dowry. I was furious, and for a moment I was on the point of suddenly entering the room and slapping the

faces of my lover and the ladies. I restrained this impulse, however, realizing that a scene in an inn would compromise me still more, and that it would be much better for me to take myself off without saying anything, and thus get away from M. Anatole.

"It was not difficult for me to leave the inn; I reached the highway and got into a diligence which was returning to Bordeaux. Finally, I managed to get into the house without my father even suspecting that I had eloped for the second time. This was playing with good luck, but I swore that no one should take me in the same snare again.

"Some days passed without my hearing anything of Anatole; finally, I received a letter from him. He demanded an explanation of my conduct and again made a thousand vows of love. Then, at last, he demanded that I should appoint a rendezvous. You may easily suppose that I did not answer. The next day another letter, in which the gentleman himself made an appointment for me to meet him. This time I went to my father and told him that M. Anatole, whom I could not bear, had ventured to give me a rendezvous. I informed him as to the place where the young man was to meet me. My father kissed me, thanking me for my confidence and my wisdom, and told me that he would undertake to correct the impertinent fellow who had dared to write to me. In fact, that same evening, M. Anatole was very soundly kicked by my father."

Frédérique stopped to moisten her lips with

malvoisie, while I turned round that I might see her more fully. After a moment, during which we both seemed to reflect, Frédérique resumed her speech, —

“These, my friend, were the results of my two first experiences as a young girl. They disillusioned me as to those pretty, romantic love stories which they tell at boarding-school. Some time after, my father proposed M. Dauberny as a husband. I did not know him, but I accepted him with confidence. I did not wish to love again, so it mattered little to me what husband they gave me. I therefore married M. Dauberny. You do not know my husband, permit me to draw his portrait for you. M. Dauberny, who is now forty-four, was thirty-six when he married me, but a man of thirty-six is still young, especially if he is good-looking. My husband is a fine man. His features are regular, he has no mobility of expression, but, in the first place, one may take that for gravity. Then, he was not stout as he is today. In the first days of our union he was not unpleasing to me, only I thought that he did not give himself trouble enough to please me. I was only twenty-one and, frankly, I was worthy of attention. Instead of that my husband already left me to go—where? I was ignorant as to that, but one day I took a fancy to know. I dressed myself in man’s clothing. I had often put on that costume to amuse myself and I wore it with as much ease as that of my own sex.

“ I watched M. Dauberny, he got into a cab. I followed him in a cabriolet. I thought that he was going to take me among some lorettes or at least among grisettes. I was surprised to see his cab proceed along the Faubourg du Temple, past the barrier, and stop at the Courtille, in front of one of the most famous restaurants of the neighborhood. M. Dauberny was going to the Courtille, but what had he come there to do? Was it from simple curiosity, from a taste for those popular scenes to which the court went formerly to divert itself in the Grand-Salons of the Rue Coquenard. I must follow M. Dauberny, to be better informed. I confess that I hesitated, that I was for a moment frightened on finding myself in the midst of people so new to me, at hearing at the same time laughing, shouting, swearing, singing, hallooing around me. But, you know, I never like to draw back. I went into a wine merchant’s restaurant, which seemed to be doing a good business, I passed in front of immense counters and followed the crowd, looking around for my husband. Everyone was going up a grand staircase; I did likewise. Fortunately, my costume was very simple and I was not identified as a woman, although some men passing near me looked at me, and said, —

“ ‘ Oh, who’s this ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Why, it’s some nobleman’s valet de chambre. How stupid he looks in his coat, anyone would say that he didn’t dare to move. And he has gloves,

there's style for you! he's got gloves! He comes from a wedding, apparently.'

"All this was not calculated to reassure me. I took off my gloves and thrust them into my pocket. I put my hat a little on one side, to make me look jolly, and I reached the first floor. I found myself in an immense room where there was an orchestra. The middle of this room was reserved for dancing and surrounded by a balustrade, but outside the balustrade were tables, guiltless of cloths, around which were set wooden benches. At almost all these tables men and women were eating and drinking. None of these people refrained from speaking out loud, laughing, singing or apostrophizing one another. They called the waiters, who had enough to do to answer their customers, and when to this noise was added that of the orchestra, which consisted of wind instruments and a big drum, and that of the dancers, who were not shod in pumps, it was a bacchanalian revel, which completely stunned one, especially when heard for the first time.

"The heat was suffocating; there was a steam in the hall caused by the dishes they served and the wine that was spilt on the table, the dust which the dancers made, the many breaths and the perspiration, which seemed to be the normal state of the company. I had a mist before me, my eyes pricked and I felt myself totter like a drunken person. I supported myself against the table. A waiter came up to serve several women with glasses of brandy.

I asked him for one and swallowed it at a draught, amidst the applause of the ladies who surrounded the table.

“ ‘He knows how to do it, this lad does,’ said one of them, ‘with his pretence of not touching it he imbibes his little glass like a veteran fireman. He has my esteem. Say, my fine fellow, I engage you for the waltz.’

“ I thanked these ladies, declaring that I did not waltz, and I hastened to leave their table, for they seemed to take too great a fancy to me. In the midst of the crowd which was pushing around the tables, I at last perceived my husband. M. Dauberny had seated himself at a table at which were seated two women with little shawls crossed over their breasts, a real fishwoman’s costume, when not in her Sunday finery. The brandy which I had drunk had restored my spirits. Instead of being timid, I felt disposed to beat all those who would have opposed my designs. I slipped behind M. Dauberny and seated myself on a bench which was at a table next to his. I asked for wine, veal, bread, and I was then able to hear perfectly my neighbors’ conversation, inasmuch as the dames who were with my husband had voices which dominated even when the big drum was beaten. The two women with shawls were young, one of them was ugly, while the other had rather pretty features, but what an expression of effrontery; what bold eyes, what voices, what gestures and what language. I have never

been a prude ; I confess, however, that I felt myself blush on hearing the conversation of these women. This appeared, however, to be very much to M. Dauberny's taste, for he pressed up close to Mademoiselle Mariotte, which was the name of the one whose looks seemed to defy a body of the guard. I heard also that she called my husband Bouqueton, the name he had taken among his charmers of the Courtille.

“ They were already acquainted, for Mademoiselle Mariotte said to him, —

“ ‘ Why didn't you come here the day before yesterday, as you had promised me, scamp ? You made me accept a salad from the brothers Garenboules, who gave me a lot of things to drink and played cards with me until I had won all their money. If you don't keep your word any better than that, Bouqueton, I'll play you some tricks which will put those of the monkeys into the shade. ’

“ Monsieur Dauberny excused himself, and ordered two or three dishes and several measures of wine. I was expecting to see him dance with his sweetheart, but he contented himself with feasting her and even making her tipsy. Mademoiselle Mariotte became very tender in her cups, and I heard kisses exchanged behind me. I beg you to believe that my heart was not wounded in the least. Since I had seen M. Dauberny make soft eyes at Mademoiselle Mariotte, I had felt nothing for the man but disdain, and disdain, you may believe me,

is the best remedy for love ; but I had never had any love for M. Dauberny. The embraces became more frequent, which seemed to be a very ordinary thing in this den, for there was a rolling fire of them at every table. But suddenly my husband's mistress rose and led him away, exclaiming, —

“ ‘ It seems to me that the private rooms are not made for wax figures.’ ”

“ They went off arm in arm, this time I had no desire to follow them, for I had seen and heard enough. I hastened to pay for that which I had not touched, and to leave this restaurant where pleasure was so noisy, gallantry so shameless. For several days I did not see my husband, I said I was ill and kept my room. He came to see me, but I pretended that I needed rest so as not to receive him. I felt such a strong aversion to him that the mere sound of his step upset me. However, before coming to any determination, before letting him know that I was aware of his degraded tastes, I asked myself if the man might not have been led there once by some extraordinary circumstance, if it would be right to condemn him for a single fault. You see, I bore him no ill-will. What I had seen would have been sufficient for a great many women to make them look upon themselves as free from their vows.

“ I resolved to once more follow M. Dauberny, being fully persuaded in advance that I should only acquire new proofs of his shameful inclination. This

time instead of wearing an overcoat and round hat, I put on a blouse and a cap. I was careful to avoid gloves and tried to blacken my hands. In fact, I disguised myself as a young workman. But instead of leading me to the Courtille this evening, M. Dauberny, who was on foot, carried his steps towards the city. Presently he turned into a narrow, muddy street, the houses of which were of a very gloomy aspect. I have learned since that this was in the Rue Saint-Elois. I recalled the romance of the 'Mysteries of Paris.' I trembled as I thought that I was perhaps going to be forced to follow my husband into a house of ill-repute, but my costume protected me, nobody paid the slightest attention to me. M. Dauberny stopped in front of a place which was called a café; he looked through the windows, it must have been difficult to see anything through them, for they were covered with a bed of smoke, so M. Dauberny, who probably could not see the interior of the place, seemed to hesitate, when a gentleman came from the other end of the street and slapped my husband on the shoulder. I recognized this newcomer as a man named Faisandé, who was very intimate with M. Dauberny and sometimes came to the house. But this gentleman, who was a Treasury clerk, had always seemed so reserved in his speech, he professed such severity of principle and showed so little indulgence for the slightest peccadillos that I had thought him a Cato."

"Faisandé," cried I, "a Treasury clerk, a hypocrite and a glutton ! oh, that is indeed he !"

"Do you know him ?"

"He was at the dinner at Deffieux's, the day I ventured to go to Mademoiselle Guillardin's wedding. He thought it very wrong that a few rather free jokes should be uttered — he was doing the moral to us."

"Oh, that is indeed the man. Let me finish my story."

"As M. Faisandé approached, I stretched myself on a stone bench which was in front of the den. I hid my face against the wall, and I heard these gentlemen talk.

" 'I was waiting for you,' said my husband to Faisandé.

" 'Why didn't you go in ?'

" 'I am not known there yet, as you are. I do not know if they will accommodate me with a private room.'

" 'You must say, "I am a friend of Saint-Germain," that is the name I am called by here, they'll show you to one at once.'

" 'You seem to be an habitué of the place.'

" 'I sometimes pass a week here without going out.'

" 'A week ! and what about your office ?'

" 'Oh, I don't care about that.'

" 'And your wife ?'

" 'She may go hang. I am never restrained by

her ; a week after my marriage I did not sleep at home for three nights in succession ; it's necessary to put one's wife on a good footing at once. You should have done the same with yours.'

" 'Oh, mine troubles very little about what I do. I can go and come and she will not say a word to me.'

" 'That is as it should be ! But let us go in, they must be expecting us.'

" 'By Jove ! don't call me anything but Bouqueton !'

" 'And call me Saint-Germain.'

" 'That's a good idea ; that of changing one's name !'

" 'It's much better to take the name of someone against whom you have a grudge in a risky adventure, and then if the adventure is talked of the world lays it at the door of the man whose name you have taken.'

" 'What a devilish fellow you are, Faisandé ! you think of everything. Come in.'

" My husband went into the den with his friend. Some moments later three or four street urchins of fourteen to fifteen entered the horrible café ; I threaded my way in among them. I wanted to see the interior of this resort. That was bold of me, was it not, my dear Charles ? but there are days when I would brave the greatest dangers ; this was apparently one of them.

" I found myself in an immense hall, which was

as low studded as a basement. The air was so thick with smoke here that it was impossible on entering to perceive a billiard table placed at the back of the hall. Not until the eyes had grown a little accustomed to this density could one distinguish objects around. Tables were ranged everywhere. A great number of men of all ages surrounded the billiard table, which was lighted by a lamp with two branches which hung from the ceiling. A kitchen lamp was placed on a counter near the entrance. These lights were the only ones in the café, so certain parts of the hall were completely dark. There were a good many people around the billiard table; very few women, but, on the other hand, young people, or rather children, who were barely fourteen years old and who had worn features, hollow eyes and livid skins, indicating that they were already steeped in debauchery. As to the women, I need not tell you of what class they were. They were not so noisy here as at the ball at the Courtille; on the contrary, everyone spoke in whispers, and except for the energetic swearing of the billiard players, a sinister silence reigned in the place. When I found myself in this frightful den, to which the Belleville tea garden was a Château des Fleurs, my heart was constricted. I was about to leave when four women came in together. All four were young, well-built, dressed like the unhappy creatures who flit about that neighborhood; with necks uncovered, eyes inflamed, and foreheads on which all the vices were

graven. Some men in blouses came towards them, exclaiming, —

“‘Ah! here come the tipplers; we are going to have some fun this evening.’

“‘Good evening.’

“‘Good evening.’

“But the four newcomers pushed away the men who surrounded them, exclaiming with an almost disdainful air, —

“‘We are not going to join you this evening. That won’t suit us. We are engaged. Have Messieurs Bouqueton and Saint-Germain arrived?’

“‘Certainly,’ said a woman who stood behind the counter, and who had been darting flaming glances at me. ‘They are waiting for you, the table is laid.’

“‘Devil take it, they are in luck!’ cried one of the men.

“‘Yes, yes,’ answered the four girls, ‘we are going to get something good, and if you are nice you shall have some of it. Make way there! Let us get to work at it.’ And they disappeared through a little door at the back of the hall, which closed after them.

“I hastened to leave the place, and it was time, for the woman at the counter had already pointed me out with her finger to some men, who were looking at me also. I ran as fast as possible through the street; it seemed to me, and I still think I was not mistaken, that I was pursued by men who left

the café after me. But some soldiers came along and I walked beside them till I was in a more frequented neighborhood. Then I got into a cab and was driven home.

“I do not know how to tell you what passed through my mind when I could calmly reflect on my position. I remembered that I was the wife of a man who was well-born, well-educated; who bore an honorable name and who could frequent the best society of Paris, who had a young, pretty, and by no means foolish wife (I flattered myself, perhaps, but no matter) and that this man was in one of those dens of vice that are tolerated in a great city, that he was in company of women of the lowest type, and that he would probably pass the night there. I shuddered convulsively; I grew furious, and cried with a kind of rage, ‘And I am the wife of such a man!’

“To calm myself, I thought of that miserable hypocrite of a Faisandé; he also has a wife; I happened to have met her twice, and that wife, who was young and pretty, had every quality that the good mother of a family should possess; she was prudent, steady, economical, not at all coquettish, and she adored her husband. For it seems as if it were a fatality for the most worthless fellows to find such phoenixes. What is more, M. Faisandé has a daughter, but that did not deter the man who yielded to his infamous inclinations without wishing to recall his title of father.

“I, at least, had no child, and at that moment I thanked Heaven for it. Resuming my strength, my courage, I said to myself that a great many women, no doubt, have passed through the same experiences as myself. Ah, if one could but know all the secrets of households! This is no romance, my friend, I have invented nothing. It is a true story.

“Later on I experienced something like a feeling of joy as it dawned upon me that I was free; that M. Dauberny had himself relieved me from all the vows that I had made, for I did not feel disposed to imitate Madame Faisandé, who, while fully aware of her husband’s conduct, hardly dared to address a single reproach to him, and remained faithful to her duty. That may be a very beautiful thing to do, but I am not so virtuous as all that; and, frankly speaking, I have never understood that maxim of the Gospel which tells us to return good for evil. No, no, we should not forgive an insult; we should not bow over the hand that strikes us, for then the person who has offended us would renew the insult and redouble the blows. The law of retaliation is the natural law. It is my idea of justice. Three days rolled by and I saw nothing of my husband. He had probably remained in that resort where his friend Faisandé boasted of sometimes passing a week. At length, one morning, M. Dauberny appeared before me and came up to me as if to kiss me. I felt as if I were about to be

touched by a toad. I rose quickly, and no doubt my face showed what was passing in my mind, for M. Dauberny paused in consternation.

“‘Monsieur,’ said I, pointing to the door of my room, ‘you will never again pass over that sill; what is more, you will seek neither to see me nor to speak to me. Hereafter, we are entirely strangers one to the other. I shall never go out with you. When I dine at home, it will not be at your table; we shall each have our own. Entire liberty I will have, monsieur. I shall do everything that I please—everything—Do you understand, monsieur? and you will not venture to find fault with any of my actions.’

“Monsieur Dauberny, who on hearing this had at first been stunned, wished to ask of me an explanation. I closed his mouth with these words.

“‘I know the Courtille, Mariotte, the den in the Rue Saint-Élois and the four tipplers.’

“Monsieur Dauberny turned pale and trembled; he stammered a few words which I could not seize, then, bowing to me, he hastily disappeared. Since that day, and that was several years ago, I have not exchanged a word with my husband. We live as I had arranged. Sometimes three weeks elapse without my seeing him, and when by any chance we happen to meet we exchange a bow, and that is all. Society is accustomed to seeing me without my husband; as to what it thinks, that matters little to me. The world is so often deceived in its judg-

ment that we should care little for what it says. I have often thought that our own self-esteem is of more value than the consideration people lavish on those who do not deserve it."

CHAPTER XI

A MOMENTARY FORGETFULNESS. COQUETRIES. BACCARAT. A FALSE NOTE

"MY dear Charles, here is the secret of my liberty, of my conduct, which gives room for so much talk ; that is why I invited you to supper this evening with this poor baron who is so soundly asleep now. In fact, this is why I have a table where I can entertain whomsoever I see fit, without fearing that anyone should find anything to say about it. Are you pleased that I have told you all this?"

"Oh, yes," said I, pressing Frédérique's hand closely. "Yes—in the first place I am proud that I have inspired you with confidence, then—I—I—"

"You are pleased to think that I am not quite such a worthless subject as you had thought at first."

She was right, I now thought her conduct quite natural, or at least very excusable. Frédérique's head was no longer on my shoulder ; she had resumed her place, and she passed her hand over her forehead, as she said, —

"I think it is time that we should separate. I feel a little tired, my friend. You will accompany M. de Brunzbrack as far as his dwelling, will you

not? He is rather tipsy. I should not like anything vexatious to happen to him, and although he has his carriage it would be just like him not to want to go home."

"Yes, yes, I'll put him in his people's hands. But just another moment, why should we part so soon?"

"Half-past three has just struck."

"Well, what matters the hour when one is so comfortable and is free to do as one likes?"

"Oh, as to that, nobody is more free than I now. You may stay if you like. But then it will be your turn to tell me something — to make your confidences. Do you understand sword-play?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because you can come and practise with me. I'm very fond of that exercise."

"What, do you know how to use the sword?"

"Very nicely, and I am quite proud of it. I told you that I was a man. It is quite natural, then, that I should have learned what completes a man's education."

"Then you must also ride on horseback?"

"Oh, that's an exercise, too, which I adore. We'll make some little excursions together, and you shall see that I'm not afraid and can go at full speed. Why, I believe you're not listening to me. But what the devil am I talking to you like this for? Poor fellow, speak to me of Armantine. It is such a great relief to speak of the object of one's affec-

tions, and you are very much in love with her, are you not?"

I confess that at this moment I was thinking little of Madame Sordeville, so the tone in which I answered was rather cold.

"I was very much in love with her, but the welcome which I have received this evening has cooled me."

"Oh, monsieur, when one is really in love with a woman he does not cease to love her because she has flirted a little with others; on the contrary, he often loves her more than ever."

"Flirting has never yet produced that effect upon me."

"Go in some day and see Armantine at home, during the day. I wager she will be very amiable to you."

"The lady is capricious then?"

"Extremely capricious."

"That is a fault that I never could bear."

"However, when one loves people, one loves even their faults."

"That is why I make a principle of believing that when one really loves, one is never capricious with the preferred object. Consequently, I am fully persuaded that all these ladies who have so many caprices do not know what it is to love."

"You are perhaps right, but I think Armantine is sensible at bottom."

"You think so; you are not sure of it, then?"

“How can one be sure of others when one is not always sure of one’s self?”

We remained silent for some time, but it seemed to me that this silence was not without charm. It is often sweet to think in the company of persons who are thinking also. However, Frédérique suddenly turned her eyes towards me, saying, —

“Well, Charles, you don’t say anything more about Armantine.”

“I have so little hope.”

“Hum, how very modest you are. As for that, I don’t pretend to say that you will be successful. That is a mystery, it’s the secret of the gods.”

“Yes, but you could tell me if she already has any little weakness for me that might give me the right to hope.”

“My dear fellow, it is very wrong to ask me that. If Armantine had confided in me I should not betray her; but, frankly, I know nothing. All that I can say is that M. Sordeville is not at all just, that he leaves his wife to do as she pleases in a way which indicates indifference; that Armantine is a pretty flirt, she likes people to pay her attention, and that all this might have — results. But whose fault would that be if not her husband’s? Oh, these husbands! I have no reason to love them. Well, of what are you thinking? you are not listening.”

“Indeed I am. I was thinking that you — oh, no, it isn’t worth while, I would much rather say nothing.”

“My dear friend, if you don’t like capricious women, I detest those persons who begin a speech, a phrase, then stop and don’t finish it. There is nothing which seems to me more impertinent. It is almost an avowal that they had something disagreeable to say to us, and that they perceived it in time. Our conjectures sometimes get far away from the truth. Finish what you were about to say to me, I beg of you, I insist, or I shall quarrel with you. Come, quick, don’t think what you are going to say or you won’t tell me the truth.”

Frédérique pressed me so hard, in fact, that I had not time to think of a fib, which often serves in a similar case, and I answered, almost ashamed,—

“I was thinking of M. de Saint-Bergame, and I was asking myself a great many questions. You told me you had broken with him, but do you not fear that he will be still further vexed if he should know that you had company tonight for supper?”

Frédérique drew her lips very close and frowned. I felt that I had indeed been very indiscreet, that I had no right to ask such questions; but the thought had been so long on the tip of my tongue that I could not help asking it; it had been bothering me since the beginning of the supper.

“What made you think of M. de Bergame again?” cried Frédérique at length, with an expression of anger. “Is it because you wish that he were here? You would have been pleased to meet him? Then you would not resemble him, for he cannot bear

you. I don't know why, but the fact is he doesn't like you."

"I don't regret the absence of this gentleman at all, quite the contrary, but it surprised me because —"

"Because you guessed that he was my lover, did you not? Good heavens! it didn't take much cleverness to discover that."

"Well, since you don't hide it, you should not be angry because I mentioned it to you."

"There are things that one can never hide successfully; however, one doesn't wish to be brought face to face with them. But this evening you have uttered a good many —"

"Stupidities, why don't you finish? I am like you, I like people to finish their thought."

"Oh, well, yes; that is to say, stupidity is not the exact word; a great many of those things which people think to themselves but do not say."

"Pardon me, I have a bad habit of saying all the things that come into my mind. It is a great defect I know, and I've often had occasion to repent of it in society. I regret it all the more now because I see that you are angry. However, it was you who said just now, 'Do not let us hide anything one from the other.'"

Frédérique turned her eyes towards me, gave me a delightful smile, and held out her hand, saying, —

"You are right, I was wrong to be vexed, since it was settled that we should be like two brothers.

Come, give me your hand! that's right. But you see, you touched on a sensitive chord. I am angry with M. Saint-Bergame, the matter is still quite fresh, and wounds which lie near the heart are not quickly cured. I'll tell you about it."

"No, I do not need to know."

"Oh, but I want to tell you! How strange you are, now you want to prevent my speaking."

"Because I really regret —"

"Hush, hold your tongue and listen. You know that Saint-Bergame writes for a newspaper?"

"Yes."

"In this paper there is a great deal in regard to literature and the stage. Saint-Bergame almost always writes the articles on the stage. I have often thought that he was partial and unjust in his judgment, and I've never hesitated to tell him so. When, after the success of a piece I would read in his journal that the work had been hissed to death I would exclaim, 'What you have written there is untrue, that is very wrong. Why should you condemn this piece?' 'Because the author is not friendly with me; because he did not come to ask my good will.' 'So because an author has some feeling of dignity, because he will not go and beg for praise, because he relies on your justice, your impartiality, you deny that his work has any merit. And you call that following your occupation as a critic. It is a villanous one then. You had better be a mason, if that is the use to which you put your talent.'

“Saint-Bergame would laugh at my anger and it never went further; but some days ago I had noticed at one of the theatres on the boulevards a very pleasing young debutante, who had displayed very promising talent in her part. Saint-Bergame was with me and had the same opinion as I about the young actress. ‘Then you are going to say something nice about her in your paper,’ cried I. He smiled in a singular way as he answered me, ‘We shall see, that will depend. ‘And on what will it depend, who can prevent you from writing what you think at this moment?’ ‘That young actress is being courted by one of my friends.’ ‘Well, what connection can that have with the article you are going to write?’ ‘The little thing puts on a good many airs. She won’t listen to my friend’s propositions, she refuses his bouquets.’ ‘However, if your friend doesn’t please her, is she not free to do as she pleases?’ ‘Pshaw, all that is mere comedy. She wants to draw my friend on. But he has invited her to a charming dinner for tomorrow. I am to dine with them, if she comes to it I shall laud her to the skies, if she doesn’t come—I shall crush her.’

“I said nothing, but you can understand what was passing in the depths of my heart. I turned away my eyes that Saint-Bergame might not see in them what I thought of him. I impatiently awaited the next day, which was the day before yesterday. I hastily read Saint-Bergame’s paper,

and there found an article on the young actress I had seen. Not only did they criticise her acting, her manner, her bearing on the stage, in the most bitter terms, but they attacked her person also. She was pretty, they made her ugly; she was well-built, they said she was deformed; she was graceful, and they could not find enough to say about her awkwardness, her embarrassed appearance; in fact, if one believed the paper, she was a kind of monster that had been put on the stage to divert the public for a moment.

“I crushed the paper in my hand and threw it down. I felt very angry with Saint-Bergame. When he presented himself at my house I threw his infamous article in his face and told him that he was a coward; that a man who would thus vent his spleen on a woman did not deserve to be loved by anyone, and that I forbade him again to come to my house. He tried to insist and to joke, and treated me as though I were stubborn, but when he saw that I was serious I think he got angry in his turn, and asked me by what right I ventured to judge his writings. I did not answer him, but went into my own room and shut the door. He went off furious, and I have not seen him since.”

“And if he returns?”

“I shall not receive him. The thing is ended, quite ended.”

“And you do not regret him?”

“I regret having had anything to do with him,

that is what I regret. He is nice-looking, and he pleased me, but I feel now that I never loved him."

"But if he loves you he will come back, he will beg of you, supplicate you."

"He will do nothing of the kind, he doesn't love me either. My regard flattered his self-conceit, and that is all. He's a man who thinks that a woman is only too lucky when he deigns to look at her. Oh, I know him now, I know him only too well. I see now what he is. And besides, he was not faithful to me, I am certain. This actress, who can say that it was not he himself who was courting her? My dear Charles, how is it that intimate connection, when inspired by love, so often leaves in our hearts only regrets and bitter remembrances? After love should come friendship. Should not that be the natural consequence of what two people have been one to the other? But, instead of that, people part on bad terms, and sometimes even hate the ones they have loved."

"No, Frédérique, no, it is not so when two hearts have felt real love for each other. The connection may be broken perhaps, but the happiness they have enjoyed always remains a sweet remembrance."

"Do you think so? Then I could have had no love for Bergame. Oh, yes, I'm sure now that I never loved him. Better than that, would you like me to tell you my innermost thought? Well, I believe that I have never loved any man, and I wish

to continue on that footing ; it is a great deal more amusing. I can do with these gentlemen just as I please. I can take them, and drop them as soon as they cease to be agreeable to me. You are not willing to tell me that I am right, but in the depths of your heart you think it."

"I — I am thinking that you are free at this moment."

"Yes, I think that I am almost as glad as I was when I broke off all relations with M. Dauberny."

"But in spite of that it is possible that in a little time you will be able to care for someone else."

"We shall see ; no one can say what may happen, but at any rate it won't be soon. No, I am not in any hurry to resume chains, however light they may be. I think that I was born to be independent, it is so good to do as one pleases. Why, for example, if I had still been Saint-Bergame's mistress I could not have had you to supper this evening. It would have displeased him, or I should have had to hide it from him, and I don't like secrets. Ha, ha, ha ! how M. de Brunzbrack snores ; if that is his way of paying attention to a woman —"

"It is not he who will replace Saint-Bergame?"

"Most certainly not ; besides, I don't wish to have anything to do with love again, I am decided as to that. I don't even know whether — I am right, why don't you tell me I'm right, eh ? It is very late, is it not ? I must go to bed. You are not very entertaining, I have to do all the talking."

For some moments Frédérique fought against the sleepiness which had seized her. As she spoke to me, she lay back on the sofa, her eyes closed and she spoke to me again, but suddenly stopped; she had gone to sleep.

I turned around and leaned towards her that I might study her at my leisure. I like that face, which reflects easily the impressions of the mind; that mouth should not know how to lie; the forehead is noble and distinguished; at that moment, her beautiful hair, through which just now she amused herself in passing her fingers, fell in long strands over her temples and a part of her face. I had seldom seen black hair so glossy, of so beautiful a shade. I can understand that it pleased her to vary her headdress. With that natural adornment, she was always sure of being good-looking. She had still been speaking to me when slumber overtook her; her lips had remained half open, but they were not smiling. She looked rather serious.

She had thrown herself back on the sofa on going to sleep, and her beautiful figure was revealed to me by the soft folds of the fine material of her dressing-gown. I was greatly pleased by this examination; I could not exactly define the feeling which made my heart beat faster, but I felt greatly moved. I tried for a moment to forget the seductive sleeper by glancing around me, but the peculiarity of my situation, the place, the hour, everything that I saw could only increase the exaltation which had seized



me. You can imagine yourself in the middle of the night in a delightful retreat in front of a table where you have enjoyed a delicate supper, where the decanters are still half filled with delicious wines, which you have not spared, the lamps shedding only a dim light, and beside you seated, or rather lying, upon a sofa, a young, seductive, original woman, a woman who speaks to you familiarly, and whose conversation has initiated you into the secrets of her heart. If all that does not give you a sense of exquisite pleasure, frankly, I pity you.

As to the third person who was with us, could he count? He lay back on his chair, with his legs stretched out to their fullest extent, snoring like a trooper; I drew nearer to and then away from Frédérique. I looked at her again, then, suddenly, unable to resist the impulse, I leaned over her and plucked from her lips a kiss that was anything but brotherly.

Frédérique awoke, pushed me away and suddenly rose. Her forehead was red, her bosom agitated, her eyes, which she turned away from me, seemed to me to be full of tears, and she exclaimed, in a changed voice, —

“So that is the way in which you conduct yourself with me. For whom do you take me, monsieur? I received you, I looked upon you as a friend, and you treat me like those women who satisfy a caprice. Did you think that it was to make you my lover that I asked you to come here? What,

I, the friend of Armantine, with whom you are head over ears in love, do you suppose I would have invited you to supper that I might steal from my friend the heart of a man who is paying attention to her? Oh, you little know me, monsieur, I do not love you, I shall never love you. It was because I knew you were in love with Armantine that I invited you this evening, and later offered you a brother's friendship. You did not understand me. Good-by, monsieur, it will be useless for you to come to see me again."

She took a lamp and disappeared before I had recovered from the consternation caused by her speech and before I had found a word to answer her; but after some minutes my emotion was calmed. I no longer felt vexation at being left so unceremoniously by the lady with whom I had supped. I said to myself that when one had to do with a woman like Frédérique, one must never do things by halves. If, instead of kissing her very tenderly, I had carried my audacity further, would she have cried more loudly? I knew nothing as to that, but at least she would have cried for something. Oh, these women! I did not at all understand this one. To forbid me to present myself at her house again because I had kissed her! Why could she not have scolded me gently instead of getting into a fury? "Come," thought I, "I should be a great simpleton to think further of Madame Daubigny."

But as one must always be polite and keep one's

engagements, I went up to the Baron de Brunzbrack, who had not been awakened by all these incidents, and shook his arm roughly, saying, —

“Wake up, baron, it is quite time that we left. Madame Dauberny has gone to her own room.” The baron raised his head, rubbed his eyes, then suddenly cried, —

“What, is it possible that I was asleep? Confound it, no, no, I wasn’t asleep, you thought I was, but you were mistaken.”

“Just as you like, but let us go.”

“But where can that bretty woman be, Matame Frédérique?”

“I tell you she has withdrawn to her apartment, and advised us to go home.”

“Mein Gott, she thought I was asleep too. I am very much vexed; I wasn’t asleep, I was thinking. I was always very much in love mit the lady, and you, my poor fellow, can’t love her at all. You’ve bromised me.”

“No, baron, I am not at all in love with Madame Dauberny, pay your court to her, I shall not be your rival.”

“Shake hands on that, my goot friendt.”

“Come, it’s very late, let’s be off.”

“I should like to say goot night to the lady and let her know that I was not asleep.”

“You can come and tell her all that another time; she has gone into her room, and to bed no doubt; she would not see you, come.”

I had some trouble in getting the baron to leave the place. At length, I led him away. We went downstairs together, and he invited me to get into his carriage and insisted upon driving me home ; but hardly were we seated in his coupé when his head fell gently back on the cushions and he was asleep again. I told the coachman to take his master to his hotel, and when we got there his servant undertook to take him up to his apartment. From there, I went on foot to my own place, feeling that the air would do me good after a repast which had been by no means temperate, and then I had always been fond of walking about Paris late at night. Then one can walk comfortably, and what a different aspect the noisy city presents ! Everything is calm and deserted around you. You can walk in the most frequented streets in the most populous neighborhoods as if you were walking on the outer boulevard. No carriages to stop your way, no street hawkers with their barrows to deafen you by their shouts, no passers-by to elbow you, no stalls spread with goods outside the shops for you to bump into ; no dogs to get between your legs, no horses to knock you down, no porters to sweep their dirty water over your boots. Paris at night forever ! especially since it is lighted with gas and one can see one's way as clearly as in broad daylight.

A week had elapsed since the singular night that I had passed at Madame Dauberny's. I had not

revisited the lady; respecting her orders I contented myself with leaving my card at her door. When my friend Frédérique's image came to my mind I drove it away without compunction; it seemed to me that my supper with her was a dream I had had, of which it was unnecessary that I should preserve the remembrance. During several days I was also tempted not to return to Madame de Sordeville, but before entirely renouncing this conquest I wished to present myself at her house once more. If she still welcomed me coldly, I swore that I would not again seek to see her. So one fine day, after I had made a careful toilet, which always caused my servant Pomponne to smile and look mischievous, I went to the house of the pretty brunette, whose hair, however, was not as beautiful as that of her friend Frédérique — but, then, one cannot have everything.

"Madame is in," said the porter. I went up, sent in my name and was admitted into madame's boudoir, a charming sanctuary to which the divinity must attract a great many faithful adherents.

I was welcomed by a most gracious smile, and the lady addressed to me the most complimentary reproaches regarding the length of time I had allowed to elapse without seeing her. Never had Armantine seemed to me prettier, and her amiability delighted me. I had recovered my partner of the waltz at the Deffieux wedding. I passed an hour at Madame Sordeville's and it seemed to me

that I had only just got there ; what had I said ? I hardly knew, but I quite think that I had more than once pressed her hand in mine and that she did not look as if I had displeased her. I ventured so far as to carry it to my lips. She drew it away, saying in a tone in which there was nothing of severity, —

“Why, what are you doing now? of what are you thinking?”

“Why, of you, I am always thinking of you.”

“Oh, allow me to say that I do not believe you. When one thinks so much of people, one does not remain for a week without seeing them.”

“When those persons have received us with freezing coldness is it not natural that we should hesitate to present ourselves to them?”

“Coldness ! Is it necessary to take you by the hand, make you sit down beside me, and talk with you only during the whole evening?”

“Oh, madame, you are making fun of me ; but you know very well that even in the midst of other people, before numerous witnesses, there are a thousand ways of giving joy to a heart which is suffering and uneasy ; a word, a look, suffices for that.”

“But, monsieur, those are signs of intelligence which only take place between people who understand each other thoroughly.”

I kissed her hand. This time she let me do so and did not draw it away, but she stammered, —



"You are so vivacious. I begin to think that a tête-à-tête with you is very dangerous."

"And you will not receive me again?"

"I did not say that."

"And you will allow me to love you?"

"If I were to forbid you, would you obey me?"

"Oh, no."

"Then you see it will be just as well for me to allow you to do so."

"Then I may hope?"

"Ah, I did not say that."

"Why, you will not say anything to me, then?"

"I am not so hasty as you. But suppose I too have something to say; the other evening it seemed to me that you left with Madame Dauberny — did you take her home? I should have thought that quite natural, for my friend was of very great service to you at the Guillardin wedding, and it was only fitting that you should be attentive to her."

I did not know what to answer; I did not know whether Frédérique would be willing that anyone should learn that she had given us a supper. With this doubt in mind, it seemed to me fitting that I should be silent regarding that adventure. One never repents having been discreet. I answered after a moment, —

"I took Madame Dauberny as far as her door, where I left her."

"Oh, that's singular. It took you rather a long time to tell me that."

"That was because I couldn't remember."

"Ah, Frédérique is so original, so lacking in ceremony sometimes, that I thought — "

"That you thought what?"

"But no, that would have been against all convention. It is true she does not think much of convention."

"What were you thinking then?"

"Nothing, or rather I do not wish to tell you."

"But you must have often seen your friend since that evening?"

"Once only; I don't know what she's doing now; one hardly ever sees her in society, probably she has something which is occupying her. She has to replace Saint-Bergame, for of course you know that they have broken with each other, and besides Frédérique is not in the habit of remaining unoccupied. Before Saint-Bergame there was another; before that, another. She likes variety."

I admire the way in which women betray their intimate friends, and I asked myself then what they must say when they speak of their enemies. The difference cannot be very great.

Ah! Madame Dauberny had had a great number of fleeting attachments and had never experienced a real one, which was a pity and rather surprised me, for she seemed made to inspire a real and lasting feeling.

I do not know what I was about to reply to Madame Sordeville's question, when a visitor came

in. This was a lady of uncertain age, who was almost lost in gauzes, veils and laces, which manifested themselves about her head only to lose themselves later on around her body. I seemed to see a cloud, or an old painting of Isabey, devoid of the charm of coloring. I gave way to this atmospheric person and took my leave. Madame Sordeville made me promise that I would be prompt at her approaching party and gave me a glance which filled my soul with intoxication. I went off as light as a feather, treading on air. I felt like dancing. You will think, of course, that I was very childish, and for a man who had had so many gallant adventures I should have been more blasé in regard to this one. You are entirely mistaken, I am blasé in regard to nothing. My last good fortune makes me as happy as did my first. It is a favor of Providence, for blasé men are doubly disagreeable; they no longer amuse themselves, and they bore others. Pomponne had smiled again as he saw me come in. The fellow was not so stupid as I had supposed. He could read my face very well. I impatiently awaited the Tuesday which would give me an opportunity of again finding myself with the charming Armantine. I had thought of nothing but her since the visit I had paid her. She had been so amiable, so expansive, upon that day, that it seemed to me the moment of my happiness could not be far distant. She had received the confession of my love without anger; far from that, she had seemed

to hear it with pleasure. She allowed me to hold her hand, which I pressed to my lips, and, but for the arrival of the visitor, who knows that I should not have obtained further favors? No matter, it seemed to me that now I might really hope.

Tuesday came. Pomponne had orders to surpass himself in dressing my hair. I did not know what had come to him, but he pulled my hair for half-an-hour to such an extent that I had a headache. I said nothing, however, but anxiously watched the clock. I wanted to be there, but I said to myself that it was wiser to make myself desired, and I did not doubt that she expected me. The moment at length arrived. I started with my mind full of Armantine's image. I reached her house and reminded myself that in society one must wear a mask that no one may guess our secret thoughts; but this mask gave me a great deal of trouble, I could hardly bear it. There were a great many people there already; so much the better. The more numerous the company, the more liberty I should have. M. Sordeville hastened to meet me, pressed my hand and reproached me for not having come lately to their little parties. The husband's amiability ought to have made me remorseful, but I had never had the slightest friendship for this gentleman, and besides, why did he neglect his wife?

I managed to accost the person whom I had alone come to see. She gave me a very gracious welcome, but when I wished to exchange with her

one of those glances which say so much more than insipid speeches, I could no longer meet her eyes. She turned towards a young man who had just come up and received the compliments he addressed to her, making a quantity of little grimaces which were perhaps pleasing, but which I thought very much out of place at that moment. I flattered myself, however, that my turn would come and that she had not forgotten that I was there.

But now came up the fair young man who was talking with her on a former occasion ; that M. de Mondival, who must have said to her a good many funny things to make her laugh so much. Madame Dauberny had, however, assured me that this gentleman was stupid, and I coincided with her in her judgment. Then came a tall gentleman with a beard, whiskers and mustache, to pay his respects to the mistress of the house. She answered him, smiling and playing with her fan. It seemed to me that her conversation would be long. I began to be tired of awaiting my turn. I went off with what must have been a long face, and to complete my misfortune I stumbled over the gentleman who always had his eyes nearly closed, but who still saw clearly enough, since he recognized me and drew me into conversation with him. I don't know what I answered and soon left him, for he bored me horribly. I looked on at those who were playing whist, but presently went back into the drawing-room, where Armantine was, saying to myself, —

"This cannot go on so. If she can laugh with others, she can do the same with me. I am a fool to yield place to them," and I went towards Madame Sordeville, who was then talking with a lady and who, turning suddenly towards me, burst into a fit of laughter, exclaiming, —

"Oh, good heavens, M. Rochebrune, what has become of you this evening? What a strange face you are making, have you got the toothache?"

When one is already in a bad humor, and wishes to hide it, there is nothing more displeasing than to have someone ask, —

"What is the matter with you?"

Then instead of simply making a face, it becomes a grimace. This was probably the case with me, for Armantine could hardly restrain a new desire to laugh, while I murmured, biting my lips, —

"I, madame? why, there's nothing the matter with me. What made you think that there was? I've never known what it was to have the toothache."

"Monsieur," said a tall, thin, old lady, who was seated beside Madame Sordeville, and who had no doubt misunderstood my last words, "take some eau-de-cologne and some cotton, dip the cotton in the eau-de-cologne and put that on your tooth. I assure you that it is an excellent remedy. It does not relieve the suffering immediately, but after some days there is less pain."

"But, madame," said I to the old lady who in-

sisted that I had the toothache, "I am not complaining. I do not suffer; I don't know why anyone should think that I —"

The old lady went on without listening to me.

"Then, monsieur, you have another infallible remedy in bay salt; two or three grains of bay salt, which melts in your mouth; you spit it out and put in some more salt, and so on until your pain is abated."

I saw that Madame Sordeville was laughing to the point of tears at my impatience in listening to the old lady, who kept on,—

"Above all, monsieur, do not have them pulled out. Oh, monsieur, keep your teeth, preserve them well; a person no sooner has them taken out than he regrets it. Look at me, monsieur, I have had fourteen taken out, and now I am so sorry. I feel that something is lacking to me. I know very well that they can —"

I had had enough of it. Something else was lacking in this lady to whom I had been listening all the evening; I had not come here to study as a dentist. It seemed to me that Armantine was making fun of me while the old dame was giving me a consultation on my teeth. She had gone to the piano, the concert was about to begin. If it was as good as that on the previous evening, it would be amusing indeed! I felt disposed to think everything bad. Now that the music was going on it would be difficult for me to talk with Arman-

tine. She accompanied or looked after the singers and players. In fact, she occupied herself with everybody except me. So I had been lulling myself with false hopes — she did not like me; however, three days ago, at her house, had she not been charming? Had she not let me press and kiss her hand? Had she not smiled at my confession of love? But suppose she only pretended to treat me with coldness before the world that she might better hide the feelings with which I inspired her! I clung to this idea because it left me hope. Besides, if it were not so Madame Sordeville was nothing but an open flirt, who had been making fun of me, and would make fun of me again. I preferred to think that she was dissimulating, which she did to perfection.

The Baron de Brunzbrack entered the drawing-room and came towards me.

“Goot day, friend Rochebrune.”

“Good evening, baron.”

“Do you know if Madame Dauberny is coming here this evening?”

“I don’t know at all, I haven’t seen the lady since we were together.”

“Oh, you haven’t seen her?” and the baron pressed my hand with redoubled affection, then he resumed, “That is like me, I have often been to bresent my combliments, but she has always peen out. And have you peen to see her?”

“No, I sent up my card, that is all.”

"Ah, goot, then you are not in love mit her?"

"What, baron, you still hold to that idea, do you? How many times must I repeat to you that I have never paid any attention to Madame Dauberny, that I never even dreamed of so doing?"

"Oh yes, yes, you're in love mit another. I had forgotten."

The baron could not understand why everybody should not pay court to Madame Dauberny, and I did not understand why Madame Sordeville should let everyone pay court to her. Love gives each one his way of seeing things. Suddenly, M. de Brunzbrack seized me by the arm as if he would like to crush it. I thought he had a nervous spasm, but as I saw Madame Dauberny coming into the drawing-room, I understood what had caused this convulsive movement.

Frédérique wore an original dress, as usual. A black velvet gown, closed up to the throat, made her figure seem more splendid than ever. In her beautiful hair were entwined jet and bows of velvet; this headdress made her face, which was paler than usual, severe. When I saw Madame Dauberny I did not know whether I ought still to be angry with her; I thought of the rather brusque way in which she had dismissed me, but then I remembered all the friendship and confidence which she had evinced. While I hesitated, and asked myself what I should do, Frédérique passed by us and bowed rather coldly to the baron and me. M.

de Brunzbrack left me to follow the woman he loved, and I returned to prowling around Armantine. We were playing the same game, should we be lucky? Up to the present, I did not see any luck coming to me.

Monsieur Mondival sang some comic songs; or rather said them exactly like a scholar reciting his lesson, but, as the words were witty, people laughed a good deal, and the singer attributed that to the manner in which he had sung, while his only merit was that he had chosen his pieces well. After this young man a dark gentleman, who had been talking for a long time with Armantine, sat down to the piano, where he sang an operatic air with a great deal more self-assurance than voice, but in society it is much to have self-assurance.

The gentleman was highly applauded, and when he left the piano I saw Madame Sordeville paying him compliments, I am sure. Had I wanted, however, certainly I had more voice than that gentleman. All this displeased me; and vexed at seeing she paid not the slightest attention to me, I went in my turn towards the piano, where I turned over the leaves of the music books. Armantine had perceived me, she came up to me and said, —

“It is a pity that you only sing when you are alone, for I should have been delighted to hear you, monsieur.”

“By Jove! madame, if that will give you any pleasure—”

"You are going to sing, now that's very nice of you."

"I will try to sing you a ballad ; I don't know if I can manage it —"

"Oh, what modesty, I am sure that you sing very well."

She ran and seated herself, saying, —

"Monsieur Rochebrune is going to sing, a little silence if you please."

Everybody stopped talking. I began to fear that I had been too forward. I don't sing very badly, but it rarely happens that I sing in company. As there was no way of getting out of it, however, I had to do the best that I could. I seated myself at the piano, my fingers would not move. What was I going to sing? However, I had to decide, they were waiting. I stopped at one of Masini's ballads and, as is usually the case when one is frightened, I chose the most difficult and that which I sang worst. At the first verse I could not remember the accompaniment, and, which had never happened to me before, I played two or three false chords in the bass, which must have given a very gloomy idea of my musical talent.

At the second verse it was the words that would not come to my memory. I stopped, I began again, still I could not remember, and I tried to hum between my teeth, "Tradera — deri, dera." The words of the third verse came to me fully. I wanted to avenge myself on that for my blunder of the

two previous ones. I dashed at it, and risked a note which might have been dispensed with but which I had sung well a hundred times before, on this occasion I made a dreadful failure, and I ended my ballad coughing like a person who has swallowed the wrong way.

I left the piano red with vexation and still coughing. Several persons had the malice to applaud me, but I saw in their eyes that unholy joy which people always feel in society when they find an opportunity to laugh at anybody. What made me more vexed than anything was having thus exposed myself before Armantine, who was very fond of laughing at people, and could hardly restrain herself from doing so now, while M. de Brunzbrack said to me, with the best faith in the world, —

“What a pity that you have such a gold, you were doing it so nicely.” I did not answer, I should have liked to have crawled under a sofa. I reached a corner of the drawing-room and there I heard a well-known voice murmur at my ear, —

“That blunder will put you back three months at least.”

It was Frédérique who was behind me. I understood perfectly what she meant by this. In fact, to render one's self ridiculous before people is a grievous fault in the eyes of a vain, coquettish woman like Madame Sordeville. There are so few women who love us for ourselves. With the greater number we owe our success to that which we have

obtained elsewhere. I took refuge in the card-room. Frédérique came and sat down to a game of baccarat. It was she who held the bank. They were playing for high stakes; she won from everybody. A heap of gold was collecting in front of her. M. de Brunzbrack lost all his money, but it was not that which troubled him, he was trying to obtain a word, a glance from the beautiful banker, but in vain, she paid no attention to him.

At this moment, in my endeavor to distract myself, I in my turn played against Madame Dauberny, who remained calm in the midst of her fortune, playing with perfect indifference and without deigning to respond to the sighings and oglings of those whom she had vanquished.

"Oh, you have come to play," said Frédérique to me in a mocking tone. "In fact, you are right, and, if the proverb is true, you will be very fortunate at cards this evening; but proverbs are not always true, poor Baron de Brunzbrack is a proof of that. If anyone ought to win, it is he. However, I have ruined him like the others. Come, let us play, monsieur, let us play. I shall be pleased to beat you also."

It seemed to me that there was in Madame Dauberny's voice an accent of irony which was not habitual to her. I remembered what her friend had told me in regard to the numerous lovers who had succeeded each other in her heart. Had I wished to banter also, I could have answered her

a great many things, but, no, I had a tenderness for this woman for which I could not account. I loved her with a love which was born of the confidence and friendship which attracted me towards her, but I was not in love with her. Why the devil did I kiss her while she was asleep? but then, why did she change her headdress at every turn, and make herself so attractive, so bewitching. A woman ought not to make such experiments, even on a man who is in love with her friend.

I placed gold on the table, I won; I doubled my stakes, I won again; I continued still winning, but for some moments it seemed to me that Frédérique was no longer interested in her playing. I saw her look frequently and impatiently to her left. M. Sordeville was there and seemed to me to be talking mysteriously with the Baron de Brunzbrack. Suddenly, my banker stopped and turning towards the two who were engaged in conversation exclaimed, —

“Good heavens, M. Sordeville, do leave that poor baron alone; he’s come here to enjoy himself and you are compelling him to talk to you about his government. Really, you abuse your position as master of the house. It is not generous.”

Monsieur Sordeville became dumb. His lips grew pale, but he compelled a smile and presently answered, —

“True, madame, I was wrong to talk with one of these gentlemen and deprive you of an admirer,”

"Will you not come and play, baron?" said Madame Dauberny, without answering M. Sordeville's compliment. The baron drew near, looking delighted as he exclaimed, —

"I should like to very much, madame, but I haven't a sou."

"We will take your word, monsieur. You are one of those whose deeds are as open as the day, and in regard to whom one cannot have the slightest doubt."

The baron bowed, he was radiant. It seemed to me that Madame Dauberny had said these last words with meaning, and that she had glanced towards M. Sordeville, who had not stirred. M. de Brunzbrack seated himself beside me; I offered to lend him some money, he accepted, and in a short time we broke the bank; then the fair Frédérique gravely rose and left the game, saying to us, —

"Really, the proverb spoke truly. You were to win, both of you, that was written."

"You are going, matame?"

"Yes, baron."

"Will you allow me to take you home in my carriage?"

"No, not this evening."

"Monsieur Rochebrune will come with us."

"I thank you, but this evening I cannot accept any escort; the nights follow, but do not resemble each other."

Frédérique departed; the poor baron remained

quite cut up. I went back to Madame Sordeville; I wanted to speak to her before leaving. I saw that she was alone for a moment, hurried to her, and told her how happy I should have been could I have seen her sooner and without witnesses, to speak to her of my love. She listened absent-mindedly, indifferently. When I thought she was going to answer me she exclaimed, —

“Good heavens! tea is not served yet and it is after midnight.”

She left me. I could not get over the caprice, the coquetry, the change in Armantine’s manner towards me. I asked myself if a mere false note was sufficient to cause it and concluded that I had better take myself off. At this moment, the tall, dry lady, who had already spoken to me, came towards me, and said, —

“Then, monsieur, when one has the toothache very badly, one can stop the tooth one’s self. I’ll show you how, come and sit down here.”

I did not care to hear any further, and escaped while the lady was placing herself conveniently that she might teach me how to stop my own tooth.

CHAPTER XII

A YOUNG MOTHER

THREE months had elapsed without my trying to see Madame Sordeville again. Her image was not, however, effaced from my heart; on the contrary, she recurred incessantly to my thoughts and I saw her again amiable and attractive as on the first day I had known her; I was not cured of my love for this lady by any means, but I had sufficient self-control to refrain from going to see her. I thought it very natural to love a person who did not love me; these things occur every day, but I did not understand how anyone could consent to serve as a laughing-stock for a flirt. There is a certain dignity which a man must preserve, and should he lose it, he does not gain love thereby. When, consumed with a desire to see Armantine, I was on the point of forgetting my resolutions and running to throw myself at her feet, I remembered how she had left me, planté là, to look after her tea, without answering even one word to what I had said to her.

I had not even once met Madame Dauberny; every day I regretted more keenly the friendship of this singular woman. It was so peculiar to be treated with affectionate familiarity by a woman

and yet not be her lover. At least it was a change, a departure from ordinary customs. She had given me her confidence so freely — why had a momentary lapse caused me to forfeit all that.

But, after all, it seemed to me that Frédérique had been very severe with me. She might have scolded me, have made me understand how wrong I was, without severing immediately all our relations. So much anger on account of a kiss! That was very extraordinary, for usually these are offences which the ladies willingly condone. And then there were so many extenuating circumstances. The supper, the champagne, the hour — and then that hair, arranged every moment in a different fashion.

It was the end of February, but the cold was still very sharp, when, on one of those beautiful frosty mornings that invite one to walk, the remembrance of Mignonne Landernoy came to my mind. Poor young girl, how could I have forgotten her so long, and all because I was taken up with a flirt who certainly never gave a thought to me! Straightway, I wished to repair my neglect, and wrapping myself in an enormous overcoat, I put on a muffler, and climbed the Rue Ménilmontant.

While walking along I recalled the situation in which Mignonne had been when I had seen her in the month of November; I thought of all that might have happened since that time, and felt eager to get some news of the young woman. I hastened

my steps, and I found myself at last in front of the lodge, the portress being surrounded by cats, as on the first time I had come.

When she saw at her window a man enveloped in a great coat, of which the collar was pulled up and his face almost entirely hidden beneath a muffler, Madame Potrelle pulled herself up in her arm-chair, and took one of her cats in her hand as if she were about to throw it at my head, exclaiming, with an imposing air, —

“Monsieur, what do you want? What is the matter with you? Do you think people come disguised like that into the house? Unmask yourself, monsieur, I don’t answer masqueraders, I don’t.”

I pulled my muffler down under my chin and could not refrain from laughing at the portress’ fright, as I said to her, —

“Mufflers are unknown in your neighborhood, then, madame? I think, however, it is as cold here as in mine.”

The good woman uttered an exclamation of surprise, she had recognized me, then she placed the cat, which she had seized as a weapon of defence, on its feet, and the animal quickly disappeared as I entered the lodge.

“What, is it you, monsieur? Oh, pardon, I remember now. You are the young man of the shirts.”

“The same, madame, it was I who left the work for Madame Landernoy.”

"With a letter, yes, yes; oh, I recognize you. But mercy! just now I could see only your eyes, and you can understand that startled me at first. Ah, well, you've taken time enough to come in search of your shirts; it's easy to be seen you were not in a hurry."

"That poor young woman, tell me about her."

"She's getting on nicely, though she's had a pack of trouble. You see, now she has two to work for, for her baby was born nearly two months ago—it's a very nice little girl."

"So much the better! Her child is with her?"

"Yes, of course; oh, there's no fear of her separating from it, she nurses it herself; she has not left her baby for a minute; she is so afraid that something will happen to it, that it will cry or need something, that she does not want to lose sight of it for an instant. If she goes out to do her little marketing, she takes the baby with her. Sometimes I say to her, 'Why, Madame Landernoy, leave your child in my lodge. I will watch over your little Marie while you do your errands, and you will go quicker if you have no child to carry.' But she won't. I think, God forgive me, that she is afraid my cats may do her daughter a mischief; however, they are incapable of that, monsieur, I have brought them up too well for that. They are playful, lively, that is their age—we have all been young—but as to mischief and using their claws, I have never known them to do it."

"I see that Madame Landernoy loves the child dearly."

"Loves her! Why, her child is her life, her thought, her soul! My word, when a person makes such a good mother, it would be a shame for her not to have a child."

"You are right, madame, children are a burden only to those who do not love them. And did your young mother consent finally to accept the work I left for her?"

"Yes, monsieur. In the first place, when she read your letter — she did so in my lodge — she shook her head like one who was not fully convinced. But what can you expect? — the poor girl is mistrustful. How stupid I am, I said girl, well the poor woman has her own reasons for being so. A warm cat dreads cold water — mine are afraid of it. Monsieur, I can punish them better by throwing a drop or two of water on their heads than if I gave them the stick!"

"You say that on reading my letter Madame Landernoy did not seem convinced as to the purity of my motives?"

"There was a little doubt in her mind; but then she said, 'Still, I can do this work, since the gentleman will come here to get it.'"

"The result is that my shirts are made?"

"Yes, monsieur. Oh, they have been here for more than five weeks with the little note — and during the past few days Madame Landernoy has

asked me several times if you had come, or if you had sent to get your shirts — because I think that just now — Mercy! you understand, work is not always good, and now that she has a child, the little dame has a heater in her room because she does not want her child to take cold.”

“I understand you, madame. I am sorry I was so long in coming. Give me the bill, quick!”

“Here are your shirts, first of all. You must see how they are cut and sewed. It is exquisite work!”

The portress took a parcel from her commode; but I pushed it away, saying, —

“I am sure it is done well. But the bill! — the bill!”

“I’ll give it to you, monsieur. I am sorry you won’t look at your shirts. Here is the bill — all right.”

I read it, “For making twelve shirts twenty-seven francs.”

I put my hand in my pocket and I sighed as I muttered, —

“Twenty-seven francs!”

The portress hearing me sigh said, —

“Mercy, yes, at forty-five sous the shirt — that makes exactly twenty-seven francs. Do you think that too dear?”

“No, madame, I think, on the contrary, it is much too cheap. This young woman must take at least two days to make a shirt?”

"I should think so, indeed. Put it at three and you would be more correct."

"So that by working assiduously, sometimes far into the night perhaps, because she has a child who often claims her care, this poor woman can only earn fifteen sous a day. Can she live, lodge, dress herself and warm herself with fifteen sous?"

"Good heavens, monsieur, all women who sew for a living do not earn that. But, as you say, they cannot earn a living, and they are obliged to—to—do something else."

"Madame, if I had shirts made at a shop, I should pay at least three francs for the making. I am no huckster, and I do not wish to save money out of a workwoman. Consequently, twelve shirts at three francs would be thirty-six francs I owe Madame Landernoy. There, will you kindly give her that sum?"

I tendered the money to the portress, who did not take it because she was wiping her eyes. What I had done seemed very meritorious in her eyes, then. It was but just, however.

"You are a very honest man, monsieur," said the portress to me at length, in a softened voice; if everybody thought as you do, needlewomen could live, and fewer unfortunates would be seen on the streets of Paris in the evening. However, I don't know if I ought to take the sum you offer."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because the little woman is so proud in her

poverty. She will say to me, 'He owed me only twenty-seven francs and you should not have taken anything further.' "

"You will explain to her that is the price I always pay."

"Oh, yes! but she will not think that natural. She is distrustful, as I told you, and unfortunately in the century in which we live they do so few just things."

"You must speak of her child and the thousand things necessary for it."

"Oh, yes! I know that is the way to take her. In fact, I will keep what you gave me, and give it back to you if she will not receive the surplus."

"She must receive it. But that is not all, madame. Has the young mother much work now?"

"I think not, so the money will come in very handy."

"That is not enough; that small amount will soon be spent."

"Devil take it, how you go on. Thirty-six francs; why that is a considerable sum, that is!"

"I should like to give some other work to Madame Landernoy."

"You can't keep on having shirts made, though."

"By Jove! what can I give her then? Ah, does she make waistcoats?"

"I think she tried to make one for the landlord's little boy, but they thought it was a misfit. But the little goodman is so hard to please. He had his cap

re-made five times, and in the end he wanted it made into a three-cornered hat. He's spoiled out of all reason! But he'd better not come and make my cats swear again."

"Then, madame, that is settled, I'll go and buy some waistcoat fronts. I'll bring you all the material with the pattern, and you will give this work to Madame Landernoy and tell her not to make herself uneasy—that the person is not difficult to please; that I am having them made for someone in the country."

The portress abandoned her cats that she might squeeze my hand, saying,—

"I understand you, monsieur, you are afraid the young mother should lack work; you wish to furnish her with it, no matter how. You are interested in her—well, I'll wager she was wrong to be suspicious of you. Oh, I know what I am talking about. I can smell those sparks who come for no good a league away. They don't do as you do—they thrust a piece of money in my face with a note that smells of pomatum and perfume—then they look at the house, the windows, the courtyard, as if they would like to scratch everywhere. We know all about that, that is an old dodge!"

"No, Madame Potrelle, I am not a lover, not here at least!"

"Dang it, I can easily understand you may be elsewhere. It would be sad if at your age you thought no more of that."

"I'll go and make my purchases and bring everything back here to you."

"But, monsieur, that will give you the trouble of coming back here. If you like, I will undertake that errand for you. I happen to have my niece here, and she could keep my lodge while I could go to your address, monsieur, and then, at the same time, I could tell you if Madame Landernoy has consented to take the thirty-six francs."

Something told me that the portress had a motive in making this proposition. I guessed that she wished to come to my house that she might know me better, to be sure that I had given my real name in my letter to Mignonne; and I did not know but what it was the young mother herself who had told her to try and learn who I was.

As I had nothing to fear in regard to any inquiries Madame Potrelle might make about me, I accepted the offer.

"Here is my address," said I, giving her my card. "Come to my house in two hours and I shall have made my purchases. Will you have the kindness to bring me my shirts at the same time?"

"With pleasure, monsieur."

Madame Potrelle was prompt. I had been home but a short time when Pomponne came to tell me, with a serio-comic face, —

"Monsieur, there is a woman asking to speak to you. She is holding something under her apron, as well as a package under her arm, I suppose it is

something very particular that she has come to sell you."

"Hold your tongue, Pomponne, and show the person in."

My servant executed my orders, though he seemed vexed that I should receive in my drawing-room one whom he no doubt considered unworthy, and he glanced furtively at what the portress held against her, rolled under her apron. I signed to him to leave us, which he did reluctantly.

Madame Potrelle dropped curtsy after curtsy, and handed me my shirts, which she carried under her arm wrapped in a handkerchief. The good woman admired my apartments, my furniture; that which indicates wealth always imposes on the multitude and also on the individual. I endeavored to put her at her ease, and made her sit down in an easy-chair; she still held her apron pressed against her, and it seemed to embarrass her.

At length she opened her apron and said to me, —

"I really beg your pardon, monsieur, for bringing him here — but he never goes out, poor little thing, and I thought it would do him good."

"What! Madame Potrelle, have you a baby there?"

"No, monsieur, no — it is one of my cats; it is Bribri, the youngest. The others leave him to himself, they never play with him, and all because he limps a little, the poor ducky, an accident happened to his leg. But cats are no better than men,

they have their little infirmities. That was why I wanted to give him a little pleasure, poor thing !”

“You did quite right, Madame Potrelle ; let Bribri run about a bit if you like.”

“My cats are well brought up, monsieur, and will do no mischief wherever they may be.”

“I am sure of that.”

The portress opened her apron to its full extent and a little black and white cat jumped out and ran and hid under a piece of furniture.

“Well,” said I, “have you seen Madame Landernoy ?”

“Yes, monsieur ; when she learned that you had given me more money than she had asked in her bill, she wouldn’t take it and she was almost angry with me. I said to her, ‘The gentleman always pays that price.’ She said that didn’t make any difference to her. So, at last, in order to make her take it, I told her that you had some other work for her to do and that she could let it go on that. There ! now he’s up on the sofa ! Bribri, you must not get up there, you scamp !”

“We shall see when it comes to paying for the waistcoats. Poor young girl, what noble pride ! what probity ! And this is she of whose ruin they made sport.”

“What did you say, monsieur ?”

“Nothing, Madame Potrelle. Here is the material, the lining and the pattern. Take all of them, and will you accept this for your trouble ?”

I slipped five francs into the portress' hands; she made some difficulty about receiving it, assuring me that she did what she could for her lodger without interest. I managed to dissipate her scruples. Madame Potrelle took the stuffs, but it was now a question of catching Bribri, who had hidden himself under a sofa and only came out to hide under another piece of furniture. I thought that for a lame cat he showed a good deal of agility.

Madame Potrelle went several times around my drawing-room on all fours and it was only by throwing a ball of paper on to the floor that we managed to attract and catch Bribri, whose mistress put him in her apron again, saying to him, —

“You have not been good and you shan't go out again for six weeks. Good-by, monsieur, you have no further message for my lodger?”

“Tell her I am very fond of babies, and I should like to kiss her daughter.”

“Oh, monsieur, if she could hear you, I bet she would bring little Marie to you right now. Well, you won't let three months pass again without coming to see us, monsieur?”

“No, Madame Potrelle, I shall go before long to inquire about Madame Landernoy.”

“And I, monsieur, must tell you that you are a worthy young man—because—well, anyone can see that at first sight. Well, he's swearing at a great rate—this cat. You wait till I bring you out walking again!”

I dismissed the portress, who managed to leave without Pomponne's discovering what she held under her apron, which appeared to put him in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

